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R. Kumar, A. Chakraborty, S. Fukuoka, F. Damay, Edwin Kermarrec, et al.. Survival of magnetic correlations above the ordering temperature in the ferromagnetically ordered classical kagome magnet  $\text{Li}_9\text{Cr}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$ . *Physical Review B*, 2023, 107 (13), pp.134432. 10.1103/PhysRevB.107.134432 . hal-04312108

**HAL Id: hal-04312108**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04312108v1>**

Submitted on 28 Nov 2023

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# Survival of magnetic- correlations above ordering temperature in a ferromagnetically ordered classical kagomé magnet: $\text{Li}_9\text{Cr}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$

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(Dated: April 6, 2023)

## Abstract

Motivated by the recent discovery of a semiclassical nematic spin liquid state in a Heisenberg kagomé antiferromagnet  $\text{Li}_9\text{Fe}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  (LFPO) with  $S=5/2$  [Kermarrec *et al.* Phys. Rev. Lett. **127**, 157202 (2021)], we now investigate the impact of spin quantum number  $S$  on the ground state properties by studying the isostructural kagomé magnet  $\text{Li}_9\text{Cr}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  (LCPO) with active  $t_{2g}$  orbitals and  $S = 3/2$ . Thermodynamic measurements reveal that the ground state properties of LCPO is dominated by the ferromagnetic interactions with a mean - field temperature  $\Theta \sim 3$  K ( $J < 1$  K) and the ordering temperature,  $T_c \sim 2.7$  K, and the size of the ordered moment  $\sim 1.05 \pm 0.25 \mu_B$  is significantly reduced from that of a fully ordered moment. The *ab initio* electronic structure calculations nicely corroborate the thermodynamic results and suggest the presence of additional in and out-of-plane further neighbor antiferromagnetic couplings, though significantly weaker in comparison to the dominant first-nearest neighbor ferromagnetic coupling. The spin-lattice relaxation rate measured with fields larger than the saturation field shows a magnetic field induced gap ( $\Delta \propto B$ ) in the excitation spectrum, and in  $B \rightarrow 0$  limit the gap has a finite intercept  $\sim 3$  K, equivalent to the mean-field scale. We interpret the origin of this gap is associated with the magnetic interactions inherent to the material. With our experimental results, we establish the stabilization of a ferromagnetic like ground state and the persistence of magnetic-correlations above the ordering temperature in LCPO.

PACS numbers:

## I. INTRODUCTION

The kagomé lattice with antiferromagnetic interactions has the distinction of being a highly frustrated lattice in two-dimensional (2D) that defies the Néel order and hosts a highly dynamic state of moments (spin liquid with emergent excitations). [1, 2] On the other hand, a kagomé lattice with ferromagnetic interactions does not manifest a classical/quantum spin liquid state, but rather stabilizes a purely ferromagnetic (FM) ground state. [3] Chisnell *et al.* [4] has demonstrated that the insulating kagomé ferromagnet has the potential to host topological properties such as the topological magnon bands as well as a bulk magnon Hall effect [5].

While the low - spin quantum number  $S = 1/2$  based kagomé materials have been the primary choice of researchers and were thoroughly studied in quest of discovering a spin-liquid state [1–3, 6–8], the materials with  $S > 1/2$  are relatively less explored, but at the same time are equally interesting and promising to look for some uncharted phases of quantum magnetism [9–15]. For example, be it the idea of a hexagonal-singlet solid

state [16] or a resonating Affleck-Kennedy-Lieb-Tasaki loop (RAL) [17, 18] state in the context of  $S = 1$  kagomé Heisenberg Antiferromagnet (KHAF), the appearance of magnetic field induced nematic and supernematic phases in  $S = 1$  and  $S = 2$  kagomé antiferromagnets [19], a highly debated ground state of a  $S = 3/2$  kagomé material,  $\text{SrCr}_9\text{pGa}_{12-9\text{p}}\text{O}_{19}$ , ranging from a spin glass, spin liquid to a topological glass [20–27], and the presence of a one-third magnetization plateau in a  $S = 5/2$  KHAF under higher magnetic fields [15], to name a few.

We have been investigating a family of kagomé materials with chemical formula  $\text{Li}_9\text{M}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  [28] and recently some of us discovered a classical spin liquid state in the temperature range  $T_N$  (1.3 K)  $\leq T \leq \Theta$  (11 K), and the signature of a one-third plateau in magnetization of the  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ( $S = 5/2$ ) based compound  $\text{Li}_9\text{Fe}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  (LFPO) [15]. The structure is highly flexible and can accommodate a variety of magnetic ions M [=  $\text{V}^{3+}$  ( $S = 1$ ),  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ( $S = 3/2$ ) and  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ( $S = 5/2$ )] and nonmagnetic ions M [=  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Ga}^{3+}$ ] while keeping the trigonal symmetry preserved. The material with quantum number  $S = 1$ , *i.e.*,  $\text{Li}_9\text{V}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  is found to exhibit the signature of ferromagnetic fluctuations in its ground state and this material could be a potential candidate to stabilize some of the competing magnetic phases by perturbing the local energy scale [29–33]. All in all, this family offers a greater tunability to the ground state properties

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on changing the orbital selection and the magnitude of spin quantum number by varying the trivalent ion, so the associated quantum fluctuations, very much like the extensively studied jarosite family of kagomé materials, but with an important difference being in the nature of their ground state properties [34–38]. More importantly, a low-exchange ( $J \leq 1$  K) makes this family of materials the suitable candidates to realize some of the magnetic field induced novel quantum phases.

Herein, we investigate the structural and thermodynamic properties of a *structurally clean* two - dimensional kagomé material  $\text{Li}_9\text{Cr}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  (LCPO) [28] by employing a number of probes including x - ray, neutron diffraction, magnetization, specific heat and NMR. To our surprise, the kagomé network decorated with  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions ( $S = 3/2$ ) stabilizes a ferromagnetic - like ground state. In this study, we will highlight the possible reasons behind the stability of a ferromagnetic order in LCPO.

## II. EXPERIMENTAL AND THEORETICAL DETAILS

The polycrystalline samples of LCPO were synthesized by mixing and heating the materials:  $\text{LiH}_2\text{PO}_4$  (Alfa Aesar: 97% purity),  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$  (Alfa Aesar: 99.98% purity) and  $\text{Li}_4\text{P}_2\text{O}_7$  in stoichiometry at different temperatures for varying durations (in hours):  $250^\circ\text{C}$  (6 h),  $500^\circ\text{C}$  (12 h),  $700^\circ\text{C}$  (12 h),  $730^\circ\text{C}$  (12 h) and  $750^\circ\text{C}$  (24 h) on a platinum foil in a programmed Carbolite furnace. The  $\text{Li}_4\text{P}_2\text{O}_7$  was prepared by baking a stoichiometric amount of  $\text{Li}_3\text{PO}_4$  (Sigma-Aldrich: > 99.9% purity) and  $(\text{NH}_4)\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4$  (Sigma-Aldrich: > 99.99% purity) in the temperature range  $300 - 605^\circ\text{C}$  (24h) with several intermittent grindings. The phase purity and the structural determination was carried out using the data collected on a PANalytical X’Pert PRO diffractometer at room temperature using  $\text{Cu K}_\alpha$  radiation ( $\lambda = 1.5418 \text{ \AA}$ ) and also on the neutron diffraction data (acquired on the G4.1 diffractometer at the LLB) collected in the temperature range  $1.65 - 80$  K with a wavelength  $\lambda = 2.426 \text{ \AA}$ . The dc magnetization measurements were carried out on a Quantum Design MPMS XL system and the heat capacity was measured using thermal - relaxation method in the temperature range  $1.8 - 230$  K utilizing the heat capacity option of a Quantum Design PPMS, whereas in the temperature range  $0.6 - 10$  K, a home - made calorimeter was used, and the low temperature  $C_p$  data were scaled in the common temperature range. The ac susceptibility measurements under pressure ( $0 - 9$  kbar) were done on a Quantum Design MPMS XL system using the pressure cell option from the *easylab*. NMR measurements were performed using a home-made spectrometer constructed with the software-defined radio technology [39]. For the field-sweep NMR spectrum measurements, we used a 14 T-Oxford magnet energized by IPS120 power supply, which can sweep the magnetic fields at a constant rate.

The electronic structure calculations based on density functional theory (DFT) presented in this paper are carried out in the plane-wave basis within generalized gradient approximation (GGA) [40] of the Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof exchange correlation supplemented with Hubbard U as encoded in the Vienna ab-initio simulation package (VASP) [41, 42] with projector augmented wave potentials [43, 44]. The LCPO crystal consists of two formula units with a total of 98 atoms within the unit cell. The calculations are done with usual values of U and Hund’s coupling ( $J_H$ ) chosen for Cr with  $U_{eff} (\equiv U - J_H) = 3.5$  eV in the Dudarev scheme [45]. In order to achieve convergence of energy eigenvalues, the kinetic energy cut off of the plane wave basis was chosen to be 500 eV. The Brillouin-Zone integration is performed with  $4 \times 4 \times 4$  Monkhorst grid of k-points.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

X-ray diffraction data collected on a polycrystalline sample of LCPO is shown in Fig. 1 (a). The data were refined using FullProf Suite program [46] under the centrosymmetric space group  $P\bar{3}c1$  (no. 165) and the extracted lattice parameters  $a = b = 9.6654(2) \text{ \AA}$  and  $c = 13.5904(1) \text{ \AA}$  are in an excellent agreement with the literature reported values [28]. The atomic position refinement using x-ray diffraction data, however, lead to the over-refined values of oxygen atomic positions, violating the Shannon ionic radii constraint [47] for P(1) - O(2) & P(2) - O(4) bonds. We then performed neutron diffraction experiments to reliably estimate the atomic positions and the neutron diffraction pattern obtained at 80 K is shown in Fig. 1 (b) and the refinement results are summarized in Table I. The parameters defining the quality of experimental fit are obtained to be  $R_p = 2.35\%$ ,  $R_{wp} = 3.05\%$ ,  $R_{exp} = 2.24\%$ , and  $\chi^2 = 1.85$ .

Structural Details: Edge sharing  $\text{CrO}_6$  octahedra form kagomé network in  $ab$ - plane and in a unit cell of LCPO consecutive kagomé planes are  $\sim 6.95 \text{ \AA}$  apart and separated by nonmagnetic  $\text{LiO}_6$  and  $\text{PO}_4$  units, see Fig. 2 (a). The kagomé lattice formed by the equilateral triangles (side  $\sim 5 \text{ \AA}$ : forming the nearest neighbor (nn) connectivity) has a hugely deformed kagomé hexagon with the lowest and highest angles being  $89.8^\circ$  &  $150.2^\circ$ , see Fig. 2 (b), while for a regular kagomé pattern, vertices in a hexagon tend to make an angle of  $120.0^\circ$ . Despite the kagome deformation, the structure possesses a unique magnetic site with equilateral triangles preserving the kagome physics. The magnetic interaction between Cr - ions is mediated via extended pathways (Cr - O - P - O - Cr) provided by the  $\text{PO}_4$  bridges, see Fig. 2 (c). In particular, two crystallographically inequivalent phosphorus atoms — P(1) at (4g) and P(2) at (12d) — are responsible for facilitating the interactions between intra - triangle and kagomé network. Magnetic interaction is expected to be weak in view of the extended pathways. On comparing the LCPO with LFPO, it is noticeable

Table I: Unit-cell parameters for LCPO after neutron diffraction refinement at  $T = 80$  K with ( $\lambda = 2.426$  Å) and the obtained lattice constants are  $a=b= 9.6492(8)$  Å and  $c= 13.5654(2)$  Å.

Atoms	site	x	y	z	Biso	Occupancy
P(1)	4d	2/3	1/3	0.6279(32)	0.53	1
P(2)	12g	0.3213(23)	0.0893(27)	0.8409(20)	0.73	1
Cr	6f	0.5780(61)	0.0	0.75	0.22	1
Li(1)	2b	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.97	1
Li(2)	4d	2/3	1/3	0.8639(76)	0.71	1
Li(3)	12g	0.3524(63)	0.1009(64)	0.0751(54)	0.91	1
O(1)	4d	2/3	1/3	0.5194(26)	0.71	1
O(2)	6f	0.2039(34)	0.0	0.75	0.77	1
O(3)	12g	0.6752(18)	0.1827(20)	0.6618(18)	0.63	1
O(4)	12g	0.4851(29)	0.1088(22)	0.8279(20)	0.71	1
O(5)	12g	0.3308(15)	0.2546(26)	0.8464(14)	0.27	1
O(6)	12g	0.2309(22)	-0.0064(20)	0.9310(15)	0.67	1

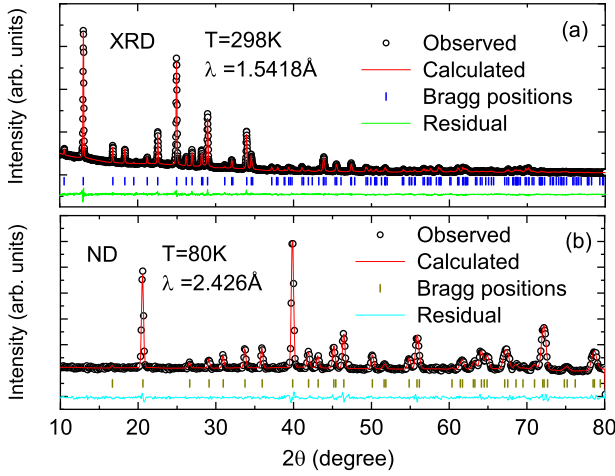


Figure 1: (a) Powder x-ray diffraction profile of LCPO collected at  $T = 298$  K with  $\lambda=1.5418$  Å. (b) Neutron diffraction profile collected at  $T = 80$  K with  $\lambda=2.426$  Å.

that the distance between Fe - ions forming the kagomé network is slightly reduced  $\sim 4.992$  Å and also the kagomé hexagon is marginally less distorted, Fig. 2 (d). Notably, the LCPO has a reduced unit cell ( $a = b = 9.6654(2)$  Å,  $c = 13.5904(1)$  Å, and  $V = 1099.536(24)$  Å<sup>3</sup>) with respect to the LFPO, which has a slightly larger unit - cell ( $a = b = 9.7195(8)$  Å,  $c = 13.6059(2)$  Å) with cell volume  $V = 1113.128(22)$  Å<sup>3</sup>.

### A. Magnetization

The temperature and field dependence of dc magnetic susceptibility ( $\chi = M/H$ ) measured in the temperature range 1.8 - 300 K and field range 0.1 - 3 T is shown in Fig. 3 (a).  $\chi(T)$  shows a weak temperature dependence in a large temperature region (10 - 100 K) and then abruptly increases below  $\sim 10$  K, indicating a possible thermody-

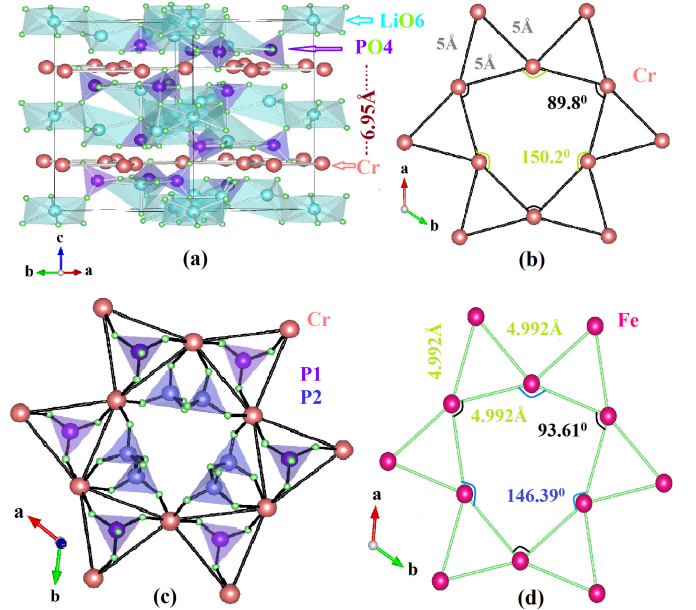


Figure 2: The crystal structure of LCPO drawn using VESTA program [48]. (a) A representative unit-cell of LCPO with kagomé layers (Cr) separated by  $\text{LiO}_6$  octahedra (light cyan) and  $\text{PO}_4$  tetrahedra (light violet). (b) A view of kagomé plane formed by Cr - atoms in  $ab$  - plane. (c) Interaction pathways between Cr - atoms, for a kagomé motif, mediated through  $\text{PO}_4$  bridges. (d) A view of kagomé plane formed by Fe - atoms (in LFPO) in  $ab$  - plane. (Note: P1 (violet) is located apically the center of each triangle and its position changes alternatively from  $z$  to  $-z$  on moving from one to the next triangle, while P2 (light blue) is structurally positioned in the kagomé hexagon)

amic phase transition. A fit to the Curie-Weiss law,  $\chi = \chi_0 + C/(T - \Theta)$ , in the temperature range 10 - 300 K [49] results in a temperature independent susceptibility ( $\chi_0 = (-6.6158 \pm 0.61) \times 10^{-4}$  emu/mol Cr), Curie constant ( $C = 1.839(4)$  emuK/mol Cr), and Curie-Weiss temperature ( $\Theta = 4.54(2)$  K). A positive value of  $\Theta$  is indicative of the fact that the predominant interaction is ferromag-

netic in nature and the estimated value of paramagnetic moment,  $\mu_{\text{eff}} = 3.84 \pm 0.18 \mu_B$ , is in close agreement with the spin-only moment value,  $\mu_{\text{eff}} = 3.87 \mu_B$ , as expected for  $S = 3/2$ . The role of spin-orbit coupling is expected to be much weaker for half-filled  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ( $t_{2g}^3 e_g^0$ ;  $S = 3/2$ ; high-spin electronic configuration) and so was the case with sister material, LFPO, which has partially filled  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$  ( $t_{2g}^3 e_g^2$ ;  $S = 5/2$ ) orbitals. Interestingly, despite having a compact unit-cell, the LCPO shows a reduced Curie-Weiss temperature in comparison to LFPO ( $\Theta = -11$  K), inferring the importance of markedly different exchange pathways and relative angles governing the magnetic properties. Magnetic isotherms measured in the temperature range 2 - 20 K (Fig. 3 (b)) do not exhibit the signature of any hysteresis and the material gets nearly fully polarized ( $g\mu_B S = 3 \mu_B$ ) with the saturation moment  $M_S = 2.91 \mu_B$  &  $g \sim 1.94$  on applying the magnetic field of strength a little over 1 T at 2 K, possibly hinting either (i) the soft nature of ferromagnetism or (ii) the presence of antiferromagnetic coupling in addition to the dominant nearest - neighbor ferromagnetic coupling. A rounded peak in the  $\chi T$  vs  $T$  plot (inset of Fig. 3 (a)) for fields  $B \leq 1$  T is a manifestation of the simultaneous presence of both the ferro and antiferromagnetic interactions, which on increasing the field value gradually diminishes in magnitude and smoothly connects to the paramagnetic region. It is to be noted that for fields  $B \geq 1$  T, the ground state gets completely polarized and the material as a whole essentially starts behaving like a polarized ferromagnet. The presence of additional couplings has nicely been captured in our electronic structure calculations (see section D) and the obtained results are in conjunction with the magnetization data.

Next, we fitted the  $M(H, T)$  data to the following equation:  $M(H, T) = N_A \mu_B S g B_S (g S H \mu_B / k_B (T - \theta))$ , where the symbols  $N_A$ ,  $\mu_B$ ,  $S$ ,  $g$ ,  $B_S$ ,  $k_B$ , and  $\theta$  are the Avogadro number, the Bohr magneton, spin, the spectroscopic splitting factor, the Brillouin function, the Boltzmann constant, and correlation temperature, respectively. The  $\theta$  was the only free parameter in the fit and the fitting values are tabulated in Table II. The fitting of the magnetic isotherms results in a  $\theta \sim 4.5 \pm 0.75$  K. It is evident from Fig. 3 (b) that the fitting starts deviating below 15 K, possibly highlighting the survival of magnetic correlations even above the mean-field temperature  $\Theta = 4.54(2)$  K perhaps due to competing interactions.

Table II: Fitting results of magnetic isotherm data with the Brillouin function for  $g = 1.94$ .

Isotherm data (K)	20	15	9	7	5
$\theta$ (K)	5.36(2)	4.97(3)	4.11(6)	3.74(6)	3.43(6)

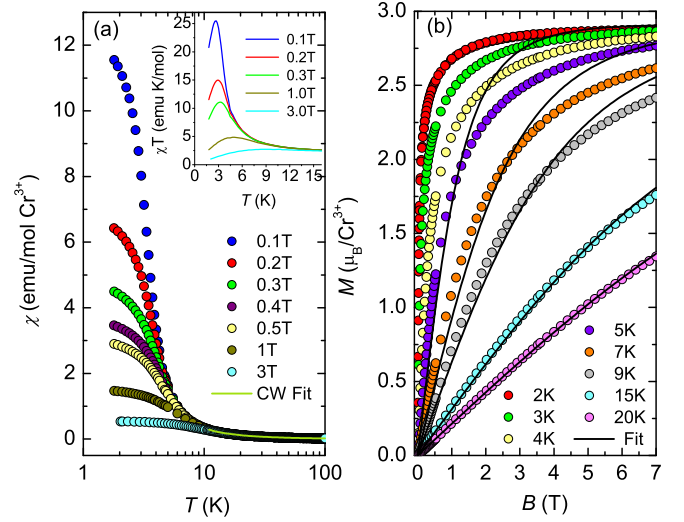


Figure 3: (a) dc susceptibility as a function of temperature in the field range 0.1 - 3 T and the solid line (green) is a fit to the Curie-Weiss law. Inset:  $\chi T$  vs  $T$  plot. (b) Magnetic isotherms (filled circle) and their fit to the Brillouin function (black solid line) in the field range 0 - 7 T.

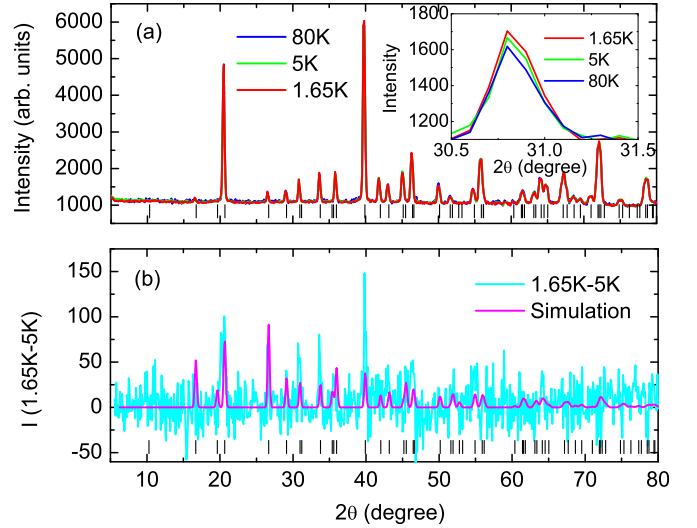


Figure 4: (a) Neutron diffraction profiles measured at  $T = 80, 5,$  and  $1.65$  K. Inset depicts the zoomed portion of diffraction profile around the Bragg position  $\sim 30.8^\circ$ . (b) Difference profile (cyan line) after subtracting out the 5 K data from the 1.65 K data. The pink solid line represents a simulated pattern for a ferromagnetic model with  $k = 0$  and ordered moment  $1.05 \mu_B$ . The negative intensity in the vicinity of some of the Bragg positions results due to a noisy background.

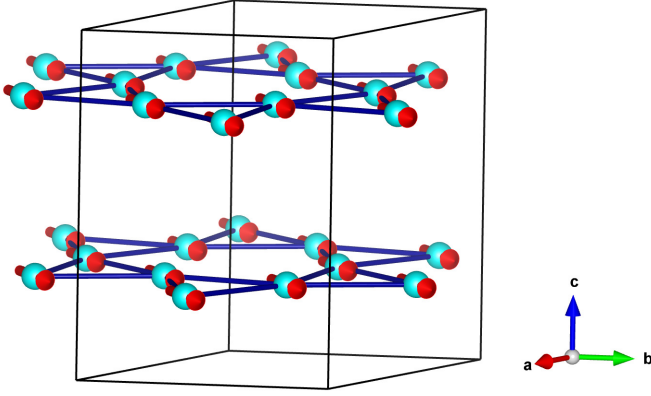


Figure 5: A possible magnetic structure for LCPO with the resultant moment lying in the  $ab$ -plane.

## B. Neutron diffraction

The neutron diffraction profiles were collected down to 1.65 K, shown in Fig. 4 (a). The absence of extra reflections other than the nuclear Bragg peaks below  $T_c$  signifies the absence of an antiferromagnetic ordering. However, a subtle enhancement in the intensities of a few reflections was observed at 1.65 K compared to 5 K and 80 K and the difference profile, Fig. 4 (b), makes this non-negligible increment more evident. A relatively small enhancement in the intensity of some of the Bragg peaks is compatible with a ferromagnetic model with the propagation vector  $k = 0$ . The representational analysis using the BASIREPS option of FULLPROF program reveals six irreducible representations (IRrep) for the centrosymmetric trigonal space group ( $P\bar{3}c1$ ). Of which, IRrep(5) and IRrep(6) found to generate reflections at most of the Bragg positions, but IRrep(5) was discarded as it missed out one of the most intense reflections at  $\sim 20.5^\circ$ . The simulated pattern with IRrep(6) is shown in Fig. 4 (b) and the resultant magnetic structure is shown in Fig. 5. The data statistics is not sufficient enough to reliably extract the absolute size of the ordered moment ( $\mu_{\text{ord}}$ ), but our best estimate gives a value  $\sim 1.05 \pm 0.25 \mu_B$ . It is highly likely that the missing moment could be distributed in the inelastic or quasi-elastic channel of scattering in the form of diffuse scattering.

## C. Heat Capacity

In an attempt to better understand the ground state and the nature of its excitations, we performed specific heat measurements in the temperature-range 0.6 - 230 K and the field-range 0 - 14 T and the results are shown in Fig. 6 (a). A sharp anomaly, hallmark of a thermodynamic phase transition, was seen at 2.7 K in  $C_p$  data on measuring with zero external field. However, the anomaly was found to get broadened and gradu-

ally shifted towards higher temperature side upon stepping up the external field. The magnetic specific heat,  $C_m (= C_p - C_{\text{lattice}})$ , was extracted after subtracting out the lattice specific heat contribution from the total specific heat,  $C_p$ . An iso-structural nonmagnetic material  $\text{Li}_9\text{Al}_3(\text{P}_2\text{O}_7)_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$  (LAPO) was measured for estimating the  $C_{\text{lattice}}$  and its Debye temperature was renormalized in accordance with the magnetic material by employing the Bouvier scaling [50]. As shown in Fig. 6 (b) and Fig. 7 (a), the transition temperature,  $T_c$  ( $\sim 2.7$  K), remains field invariant in the narrow field range 0 - 0.05 T, but the anomaly shifts towards higher temperatures and also gets broadened on increasing the magnetic field from 0 to 14 T. Such a field-induced elevation of the transition temperature is akin to the Schottky - behavior and is a typical signature for a ferromagnetic system, as for an antiferromagnet the transition temperature gets pushed down to the lower temperatures on increasing the field strength. A gradual reduction in the Schottky's peak amplitude with the applied magnetic field until  $B \geq 8$  T is also apparent from Fig. 6 (b). The field dependent variation of the peak-shift is shown in Fig. 7 (b) and it is apparent that for fields ( $B \geq 0.25$  T) the peak temperature, labelled as  $T_c^*$ , linearly scales with the external field strength, suggesting that the Zeeman energy scale becomes comparable to the exchange-coupling ( $J$ ) for  $B \geq 0.25$  T, thus above this field the ground state essentially starts deviating from a true ferromagnet and transforms into a partially polarized state. In view of the observed magnetic ordering temperature (2.7 K), we also calculated the strength of magnetic dipole interaction term ( $\sim \mu^2/4\pi r^3$ ) and the obtained value of dipolar energy scale ( $E_{\text{dip}}/k_B \sim 0.04$  K) was found to be two orders of magnitude lower than the ordering temperature, which clearly means that the magnetic ordering is mainly dominated by the exchange interactions.

In the framework of spin wave theory, for a dispersion of the type:  $\omega \propto k^\phi$ , the magnetic specific heat is shown to have a temperature dependence of the form:  $C_m \propto T^\alpha$ ;  $\alpha = \frac{d}{\phi}$ , where  $d$  and  $\phi$  are the magnetic dimensionality of lattice and exponent in dispersion relation, respectively. The  $C_m$  was found to have a  $T^{1.3}$  dependence (not shown) in the temperature range 1.5-0.6 K at  $B = 0$  field and retains the same dependence in the field range 0 - 0.1 T. The obtained temperature dependence of  $C_m$  is very close to the expected  $\sim T^{\frac{3}{2}}$  behavior (anticipated for a 3d ferromagnet) [51], see Fig. 7 (a). According to the Mermin-Wagner theorem [52], a long-range magnetic order (LRO) can not be realized in the 2D isotropic Heisenberg model at  $T > 0$  K because of the long-range magnetic fluctuations, and therefore a finite 3D coupling between the kagome layers is required to uphold a magnetic transition at  $T > 0$  K. On the other hand, for  $B = 1$  T,  $C_m$  varies as  $\sim T^{1.9}$ , which reflects the field induced perturbation in the excitation spectrum. The magnetic entropy change estimated in the  $T$  - range 0.6 - 10 K yields  $\sim 95\%$  of  $R\ln(4)$ , expected for  $S = 3/2$ , see Fig. 7 (c). In fact, the recovery of  $\gtrsim 35\%$

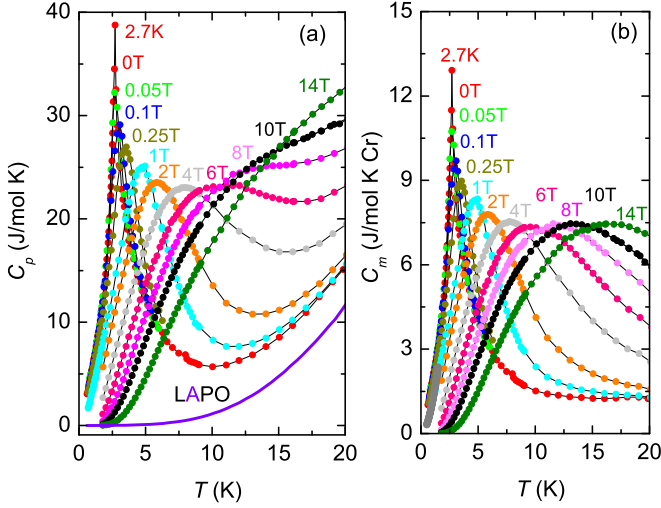


Figure 6: (a)  $C_p$  versus  $T$  in the magnetic field range 0 - 14 T for LCPO and for nonmagnetic sample LAPO at  $B = 0$  Oe. (b) Magnetic specific heat,  $C_m$ , after subtracting out the phononic contribution.

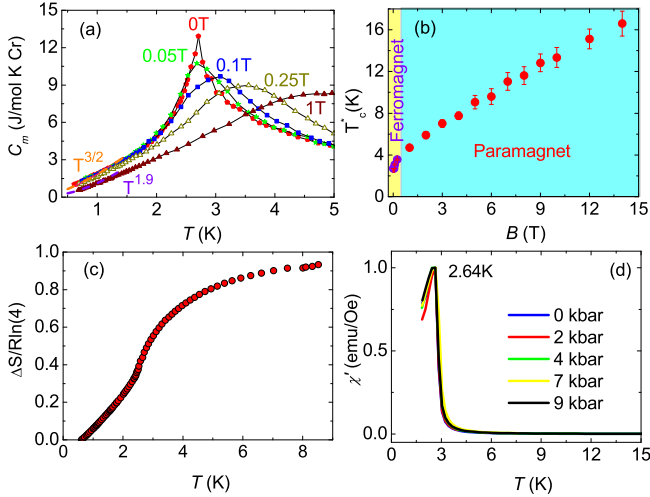


Figure 7: (a)  $C_m$  and its fit to the equation:  $C_m \propto T^\alpha$  for fields  $0 \leq B \leq 1$  T; orange and violet lines denote the fit to the  $T^{3/2}$  and  $T^{1.9}$ , respectively. (b) Field-induced shift in the peak position of anomaly defined by the temperature ( $T_c = B \leq B_c$  &  $T_c^* = B \geq B_c$ ). (c) Entropy change ( $\Delta S$ ) at  $B = 0$  in the  $T$  - range 0.6 - 10 K. (d) Real component of ac - susceptibility in the pressure range 0 - 9 kbar. ( $B_c$ : the critical value of magnetic field required to perturb the ground state).

entropy above the mean-field temperature commensurate with the magnetic-isotherm analysis and further signifies the persistence of magnetic correlations. The survival of magnetic correlations above  $\Theta$  was also seen in a  $S = 3/2$  quasi-2D honeycomb material  $\text{Ag}_3\text{LiMn}_2\text{O}_6$  [53].

ac-susceptibility measurements were performed under pressure, with an intention of exploring the possibility

of a pressure induced criticality. The real component of ac susceptibility measured ( $H_{ac} = 1$  Oe,  $f = 11$  Hz,  $H_{dc} = 0$ ) in the pressure range 0 - 9 kbar is shown in Fig. 7 (d). However, no appreciable change in the transition temperature  $\sim 2.64(10)$  K was observed and the transition was found to be robust in the measured pressure range.

#### D. Electronic structure calculation

To corroborate the experimental findings with theoretical calculations, we have performed spin-polarized GGA+U calculations with a ferromagnetic (FM) arrangement of Cr spins. The local octahedral environment splits the Cr- $d$  orbitals into low lying  $t_{2g}$  triplets and higher energy  $e_g$  doublets maintaining a crystal field splitting of  $\sim 4.0$  eV. The plot of spin-polarized density of states in Fig. 8 (a) reveals that the majority channel of the Cr- $t_{2g}$  levels are completely filled with three valence electrons and the minority channel of  $t_{2g}$  and the  $e_g$  orbitals are completely empty. Within the FM calculation, the total moment per formula unit, containing 6 Cr atoms, is calculated to be  $18.0 \mu_B$ , which further supports the 3+ charge state of Cr and is also consistent with the experimental value of effective moment ( $\mu_{\text{eff}} = 3.84 \mu_B$ ). FM calculation gives the magnetic moment per Cr site to be  $2.90 \mu_B$ , as the rest of the moment lies in the ligand sites ( $0.01 \mu_B/\text{O}$ ). Inclusion of spin-orbit coupling (SOC) in our calculation only lowers the energy of FM state further by 74 meV keeping the moment value per Cr similar to that of without SOC calculations. The small value of orbital moments ( $m_l(\text{Cr}) = 0.04 \mu_B$ ) in GGA+SOC+U calculations suggests SOC acts perturbative ( $m_l/m_s \sim 0.01$ ) in the system and has negligible impact on stabilizing the ground state.

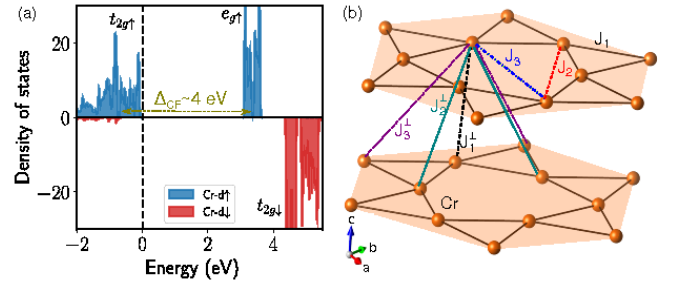


Figure 8: (a) Orbital resolved spin-polarized density of states plot of Cr- $d$  orbitals within GGA+U calculations. (b) First, second and third neighbor intra-planar ( $J_1$ ,  $J_2$  and  $J_3$ ) and inter-planar ( $J_1^\perp$ ,  $J_2^\perp$  and  $J_3^\perp$ ) exchange interaction paths.

In order to understand the magnetic exchange interactions among the large intrinsic Cr spins and for a quantitative estimation of the Cr-Cr exchange couplings, we have calculated the symmetric exchange interactions ( $J$ ) by mapping the total energies of several spin configurations to the Heisenberg spin model  $\mathcal{H}_{\text{sym}} = J_{ij} \mathbf{S}_i \cdot \mathbf{S}_j$  [53]. Our calculations suggest that the nearest neighbor

(nn) interaction is ferromagnetic in nature with exchange strength  $J_1 = 0.22$  meV. The obtained further neighbor in-plane and out-of-plane couplings (see Fig. 8 (b) for connectivity) are antiferromagnetic in nature with magnitudes  $J_1^\perp = 0.06$  meV,  $J_2 = 0.03$  meV,  $J_2^\perp = 0.05$  meV,  $J_3 = 0.06$  meV and  $J_3^\perp = 0.03$  meV, respectively. Due to large super-exchange paths, the interaction strengths are relatively small which is also presumed from the sufficiently low value of experimental Curie-Weiss temperature ( $\Theta_{CW}^{\text{Bulk}} \sim 4.54(2)$  K or  $\Theta_{CW}^{\text{NMR}} \sim 2.88(11)$  K). Clearly, the FM exchange interaction  $J_1$ , corresponding to the nn super-exchange coupling, dominates over the further neighbor anti-ferromagnetic couplings. To explore the possibility of spin canting in the system, we have also considered the anti-symmetric part of the spin Hamiltonian  $\mathcal{H}_{\text{asy}} = \sum_{ij} \mathbf{D}_{ij} \cdot (\mathbf{S}_i \times \mathbf{S}_j)$ , where  $\mathbf{D}$  is the Dzyaloshinskii-Moriya (DM) interaction parameter [54]. The calculated values of nn DM interaction is of the order of  $\sim 10^{-3}$  meV. A small value of SOC strength results in the suppressed value of DM parameter. Taken together the nn FM interaction with a number of AFM interactions and small anti-symmetric DM interaction, the calculated value of  $\Theta_{CW} \sim 0.3$  K, which is reasonably small and further affirms a ferromagnetic ground state. However, it must be noted that the calculated value of  $\Theta_{CW}$  depends on the chosen exchange configuration and could vary between  $\sim 0.3$  ( $\Theta_{CW}^{\text{min}}$ : summing up all the  $J$ 's) & 12 K ( $\Theta_{CW}^{\text{max}}$ : only nearest neighbour). Apparently, the experimentally estimated value of  $\Theta_{CW}^{\text{NMR}} \sim 2.88(11)$  K is less than the computed value of  $\Theta_{CW}^{\text{max}} \sim 12$  K, implying the relevance of additional antiferromagnetic couplings beyond the nearest neighbour ferromagnetic coupling ( $J_1 = 0.22$  meV). Meisso *et al.* [55] sketched a phase diagram based on the lattice symmetries of a perfect kagomé lattice for the identification of a most probable ground state in a large parameter space of Heisenberg model with the intra-planar kagomé couplings  $J_1$ - $J_2$ - $J_3$ - $J_3^\perp$ , which advocates the stabilization of an energetically favorable spiral state over the anticipated ferromagnetically ordered state. However, in view of the skewed  $C_6$  symmetry with additional interlayer couplings (as is the case with LCPO) the fate of the ground state selection is beyond the purview of the present model and calls for further investigations.

### E. NMR Spectroscopy

The LCPO offers two potential NMR sensitive nuclei,  ${}^7\text{Li}$  ( $I = 3/2$  &  $\frac{\gamma}{2\pi} = 16.546$  MHz/T) and  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  ( $I = 1/2$  &  $\frac{\gamma}{2\pi} = 17.235$  MHz/T) to probe the magnetism ensuing from the kagomé network formed by the  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions.  ${}^7\text{Li}$  was found to be poorly coupled to the kagomé network because of a weak hyperfine coupling, resulting from the relatively extended pathways. We then switched to  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR to probe the static susceptibility and relaxation rate measurements. LCPO being a low- $J$  ( $< 1$  K) material with a small saturation field  $\sim 1$  T, it was chal-

Table III: Fitting parameters for  ${}^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR spectrum collected at 5 K.

Line	$K_{iso}(\%)$	$K_{ani}(\%)$	$K_{ax}(\%)$	Width (kHz)	Area (arb. units)	Ratio
P1	36.86	$\simeq 0$	0.93	300.05	0.038	1
P2	30.97	4.3	4.2	661.05	0.116	3.05

lenging [56] to address the ground state properties of the material by employing NMR as a probe for magnetic fields comparable to the energy scale set by the exchange-coupling. In lieu of that we investigated the effect of magnetic field on the ground state properties for  $B \geq 3$  T. The  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR spectra were collected at fixed frequencies ( $f = 51.50$  MHz, 120.51 MHz, and 215.50 MHz) by sweeping the magnetic field using the Hahn-echo. Figure 9 shows the  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR spectra measured in the temperature range 120 - 2 K for the NMR frequency  $f = 51.50$  MHz. Structurally there are two distinct P-sites, P(1) & P(2), in a unit cell of LCPO with the Wyckoff positions 4g (2/3, 1/3, z) and 12d (x, y, z), respectively, but in the  $T$ -range 120 - 75 K, we observed only one  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR line with a nearly Gaussian line-shape because the other  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR line was also buried under the same line as a result of having a nearly similar NMR shift [56]. Upon further lowering the temperature, the  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR line shape starts developing structure and progressively becomes highly asymmetric; nevertheless below about 10 K the spectral shape can largely be interpreted as a superposition of two NMR lines: “Left” - line & “Right” - line, see Fig. 9. As evident from Fig. 2, phosphorus atoms located at the sites: 4g, *i.e.*, P(1), and 12d, *i.e.*, P(2), are coupled to three and two Cr - atoms, respectively, therefore  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR signal corresponding to P(1) is expected to be shifted more in comparison to P(2) with respect to the NMR reference-line, and also the  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  -NMR spectrum arising from P(1) is anticipated to be less anisotropic in comparison to P(2) as a result of being situated at a more symmetric position in the unit-cell. Owing to their atomic weight percentage (4 : 12) in a unit cell of LCPO, both P(1) and P(2) are expected to maintain an intensity ratio of 1 : 3 in  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR spectrum. With this notion, we chose a spectrum collected at 5 K (inset of Fig. 9) and the  ${}^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR shift was fitted using Eq. (1) and the obtained results are summarized in Table III.

$$K = K_{iso} + K_{ax}(3\cos^2\theta - 1) + K_{ani} \sin^2\theta \cos 2\phi, \quad (1)$$

where  $K_{iso}$ ,  $K_{ax}$ , and  $K_{ani}$  are the isotropic, axial, and anisotropic components of the Knight shift, respectively. While  $\theta$  and  $\phi$  are spherical polar angles defining the orientation of  $B$  with respect to the shift tensor axes.

As can be seen from the inset of Fig. 9 and the tabulated results, the “Left” - peak (P1) is nearly a Gaussian, less anisotropic ( $K_{ani} \simeq 0$  %) in nature (as P1 is located at the 3-fold axis of rotational symmetry), while the “Right” - peak (P2) of the spectrum is extremely broadened, highly anisotropic ( $K_{ani} = 4.3$  %) and the ratio of calculated integrated intensity for P1 and P2 is



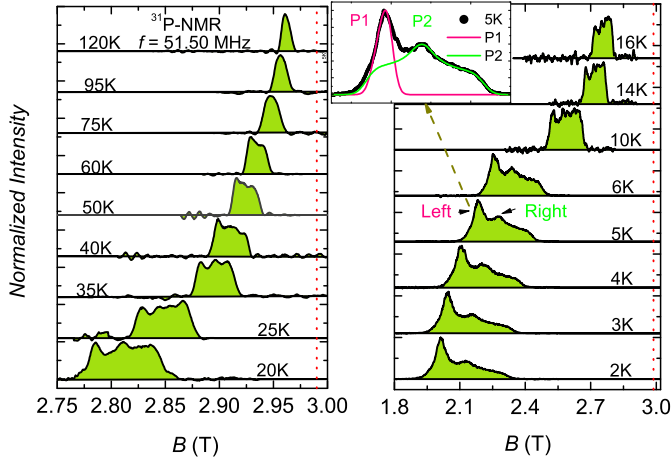


Figure 9:  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR spectra measured at NMR frequency  $f = 51.50$  MHz. Vertical dashed line depicts the  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR reference field. The peaks marked with “Left” and “Right” are originating from two different phosphorous sites P(1) and P(2), see text. Inset:  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR spectrum at 5 K fitted with two NMR lines; P1 (Left peak) and P2 (Right peak).

in excellent agreement with the expected ratio  $\sim 1 : 3$ .

Based on the fitting results, in line with the underlying presumptions, we can unambiguously assign the “Left” - peak of  $^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR spectrum to be originating from the phosphorus - P(1) (shown by line P1) and the “Right” - peak from the phosphorus - P(2) (shown by line P2).

It was not possible to isolate the contributions of two peaks from the observed NMR line and thus the deduction of isotropic ( $K_{iso}$ ) and anisotropic ( $K_{ani}$ ) NMR shifts in the paramagnetic region, so we plotted the Knight shift ( $K$ ) for peak P1 by taking the peak position. Figure 10 shows the  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR shift ( $K$ ), for P1, as a function of temperature in the  $T$ -range 1.5 - 120 K at three different NMR frequencies. The NMR shift measurements provide a way to extract the intrinsic susceptibility (free from extraneous contributions) through the relation:  $^{31}K = K_0 + (A_{hf}/N_A\mu_B)\chi_{local}$ , where  $K_0$ ,  $A_{hf}$  and  $\chi_{local}$  are the temperature independent chemical shift, hyperfine - coupling constant, and the local spin susceptibility, respectively. As evident from Fig. 10, the NMR shift ( $^{31}K$ ) nicely follows the bulk susceptibility in the entire temperature range, therefore confirming the intrinsic nature of powder susceptibility data and its variation with external magnetic field. The suppression of bulk susceptibility/NMR shift as a function of magnetic field is in accordance with the magnetic isotherm data. The hyperfine coupling constant ( $A_{hf}$ ) was determined for P(1) by measuring the shift at the center position with a fixed field ( $B = 13.0236$  T) and estimated to be  $0.355(2)$  T/ $\mu_B$ , shown in the inset (a) of Fig. 10. Fitting the shift ( $^{31}K$ ) obtained at 51.50 MHz to the Curie-Weiss law [ $^{31}K = K_0 + C/(T-\Theta)$ ] yields a more refined value of

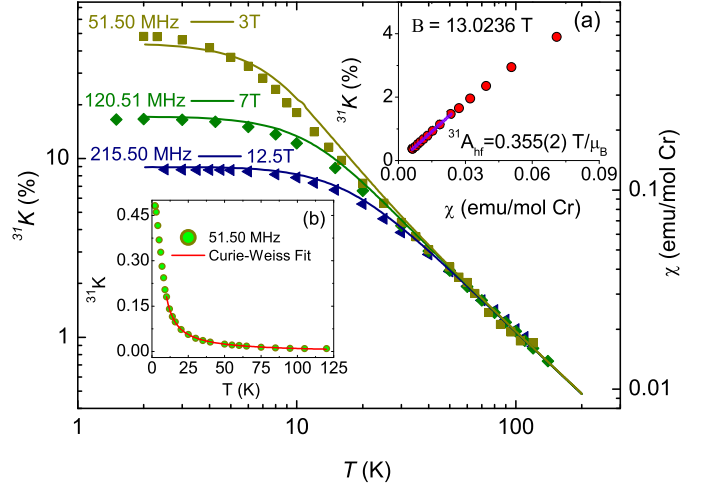


Figure 10: Temperature dependence of  $^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR line shift (symbols) measured at three different NMR frequencies:  $f = 51.50$  MHz (3 T),  $120.51$  MHz (7 T), and  $215.50$  MHz (12.5 T) (left y - axis) for line P1. Variation of bulk susceptibility (lines) with temperature measured at 3 T, 7 T and 12.5 T (right y - axis). Insets: (a)  $K - \chi$  plot for line P1, and (b)  $^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR line shift (filled circle) measured at  $f = 51.50$  MHz and the line (red) is a fit to the Curie-Weiss type equation, described in text.

$\Theta = 2.88(11)$  K or  $J = 3\Theta/(4S(S+1)) \sim 0.6$  K (compared to bulk susceptibility) with  $K_0 = -0.0037(4)$ , and  $C = 1.32(2)$  K, see inset (b) of Fig. 10. The offset ( $\sim 1.5$  K) in the value of  $\Theta$  determined from the bulk susceptibility and NMR results could be the upshot of some extrinsic contributions affecting the paramagnetic behavior of bulk magnetization. As the ordering temperature,  $T_c = 2.7$  K (determined from the  $C_p$  data), and the mean-field temperature,  $\Theta = 2.88(11)$  K, (from the  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR line shift), are nearly the same, implying that frustration plays no role in selecting the ground state.

Now we focus our attention to understand the effect of magnetic field on the spin dynamics and for that purpose the spin-lattice relaxation rate ( $1/T_1$ ) measurements were performed by employing the saturation recovery method at the peak position of line P1, “Left”-peak of  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR spectrum, in the  $T$ - range 1.5 - 130 K and at three NMR frequencies:  $f = 51.50$  MHz (3 T),  $120.51$  MHz (7 T), and  $215.50$  MHz (12.5 T). The saturation recovery data were fitted to the equation:  $M_z(t) = M_0(1 - Ae^{-t/T_1})$  and the extracted values of spin-lattice relaxation rates ( $1/T_1$ ) are plotted against temperature ( $T$ ), see Fig. 11 (a).

$1/T_1$  shows a marked frequency dependence even in the paramagnetic regime ( $T \gg \Theta_{CW}$ ). For the lowest frequency  $f = 51.50$  MHz, it attains a maximum value  $\sim 8$  (msec) $^{-1}$  at 100 K and for the higher frequencies it reduces in a non-linear fashion in the paramagnetic region, see Fig. 11 (a). In the high temperature region, where the  $^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR nuclear relaxation is supposed to be dom-

inated by the fluctuations of the localized moments of the chromium ions,  $1/T_1$  can be estimated using the Moriya relation [57]:  $1/T_1|_{\text{Moriya}} = (2\pi)^{1/2}(A_{\text{hf}}/\hbar)^2 Z_1 S(S+1)/3\omega_{ex}$ ; and  $\omega_{ex} = (6k_B^2\Theta^2/Z_2 S(S+1)\hbar^2)^{1/2}$ ,

where  $A_{\text{hf}}$ ,  $Z_1$ ,  $\omega_{ex}$ ,  $\Theta_{\text{CW}}$ , and  $Z_2$  are hyperfine coupling constant, number of magnetic ions connected to nuclei being probed, exchange frequency, Curie-Weiss temperature, and immediate neighbors of a magnetic ion, respectively.

Table IV: Parameters used in estimating the spin-lattice relaxation rate  $1/T_1|_{\text{Moriya}}$  using the Moriya relation.

$Z_1$	$Z_2$	$\Theta_{\text{CW}}$ (K)	$g$	$1/T_1 _{\text{Moriya}}$ (msec) $^{-1}$	Peak
3	4	3	1.94	11.60	P1
2	4	3	1.94	$\sim 13.0$	P2

The calculated Moriya limit  $1/T_1|_{\text{Moriya}}$  for both the peaks P1 & P2 is tabulated in Table IV and the relaxation-rate obtained for P1 (at  $f = 51.50$  MHz &  $T = 100$  K) is seemingly very close to the Moriya-limit, see Fig. 11 (a). On the other hand, a field induced reduction of  $1/T_1$  seen above 20 K ( $\gg \Theta_{\text{CW}}$ ) is most likely occurring due to a relaxation mechanism which involves the participation of lattice vibrational modes; a similar trend was also noticed in the  $1/T_1$  behavior of sister material LFPO [15]. Inset of Fig. 11 (a) depicts the variation of  $1/T_1$  with applied field at  $T = 100$  K and a fit to the expression:  $1/T_1 = AB^{-n}$  outputs in a good fit with  $n =$

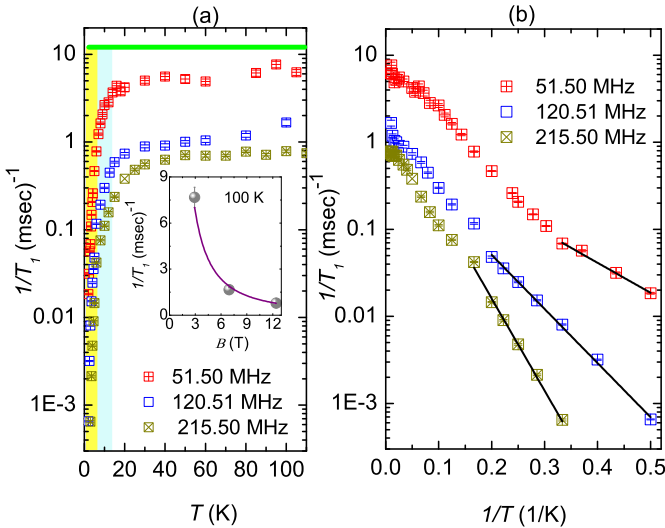


Figure 11: Spin-lattice relaxation rate ( $1/T_1$ ) measured at the peak position of the P1 - NMR line at three different fields. (a) Semi-log plot of  $1/T_1$  versus  $T$  with the Moriya limit shown by the horizontal green line. Inset shows the field variation of  $1/T_1$  (filled circle) at  $T = 100$  K and the line (purple) is a fit to the power-law:  $1/T_1 \propto B^{-n}$ . (b)  $1/T_1$  versus  $1/T$  in log-log scale; black solid lines are the fits to a function (see text).

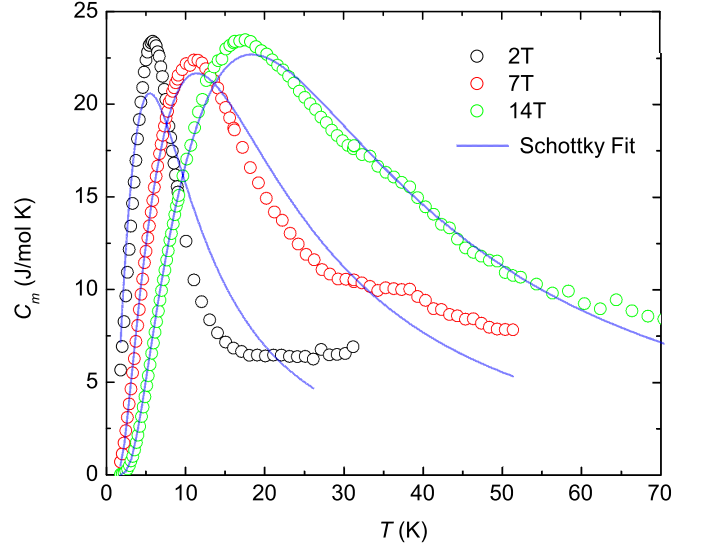


Figure 12: Temperature dependence of magnetic specific heat (open circle) and its fitting (solid line) to the four-level Schottky system at the selected magnetic fields.

1.5 (1). Such kind of relaxation behavior [58] is governed by the direct process,  $n = 2$  (non - Kramers ion) and 4 (Kramers ion), and has been discussed in the context of rare-earth salts at low temperatures with a possible extension to  $3d$  material, but its relevance in the high temperature limit is questionable.

Now, we focus to understand the low -  $T$  behavior of  $1/T_1$ .  $1/T_1$  in polarized or partially polarized state of a magnet is expected to have a gapped behavior.  $1/T_1$  data fitted to an equation of the Arrhenius form:  $1/T_1 = A\exp(-\Delta_N/k_B T)$  yields a gap,  $\Delta_N$  ( $T$  - range:  $\sim 1.5 - 3$  K for 3 T and  $\sim 1.5 - 6.5$  K for 7 & 12.5 T), see Fig. 11 (b).

In order to gain more insight about the nature and origin of this gap, we further analyzed the specific heat data by modeling the Schottky anomaly (Fig. 12) and compared the results with gap obtained using NMR data, shown in Fig. 13.

In paramagnetic region and under non-zero external magnetic field ( $B \neq 0$ ), a  $S = 3/2$  system would have equally spaced  $(2S+1) = 4$  energy levels with the lowest and highest energies being 0 and  $3\Delta$ , respectively, shown in Fig. 13. The magnetic specific heat  $C_m$  was fitted to a four level system with the following expression [59]:

$$C_m = \frac{R}{k_B^2 T^2} \left[ \frac{\sum_{i=0}^3 \epsilon_i^2 e^{-(\epsilon_i/k_B T)}}{\sum_{i=0}^3 e^{-(\epsilon_i/k_B T)}} - \left\{ \frac{\sum_{i=0}^3 \epsilon_i e^{-(\epsilon_i/k_B T)}}{\sum_{i=0}^3 e^{-(\epsilon_i/k_B T)}} \right\}^2 \right],$$

where  $\epsilon_i$  denotes the energy of  $i^{\text{th}}$  spin-level and the gap is defined as  $\Delta_i = \epsilon_i - \epsilon_0$  and the other notations have their usual meanings.

The Schottky fitting deviates from the experimental data below 7 T and results in a rather poor fit at 2 T,

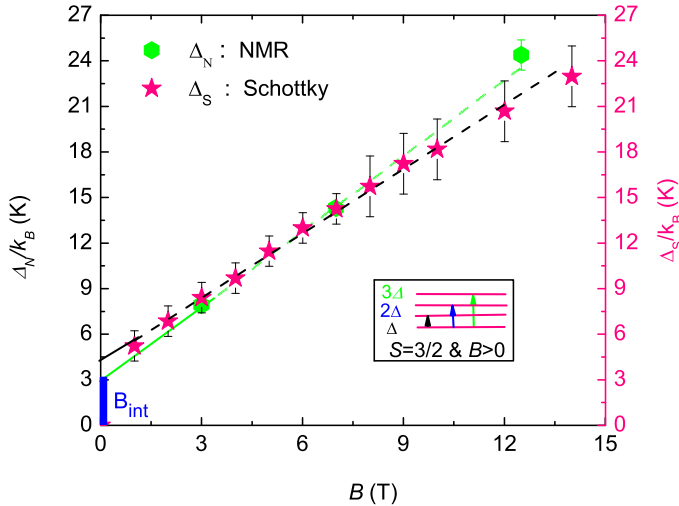


Figure 13: Field dependence of gaps estimated using NMR (left  $y$  - axis:  $(\Delta_N/k_B)$ ) and specific heat (right  $y$  - axis:  $\Delta_S/k_B$ ) data. A schematic of the Zeeman splitting scheme for  $S = 3/2$  in paramagnetic region is also shown. The green (NMR) and black (Schottky) dashed lines are fits to a straight line and the vertical thick line (blue) depicts the size of internal field.

see Fig. 12. This result is suggesting that a gradual reduction observed in the Schottky peak as a function of field, Fig. 6 (b), is a consequence of magnetic correlations, which persist above the mean-field temperature. The Schottky gap,  $\Delta_S$ , estimated by modeling the magnetic specific heat data not only nicely coincides with the NMR gap ( $\Delta_N$ ) in a wider field range (deviates slightly at the higher fields [60]), but also linearly scales with the external magnetic field, and in  $B \rightarrow 0$  limit both the gaps ( $\Delta_S$  &  $\Delta_N$ ) attain a non-zero value of intercept  $\sim 4.1$  (1) K & 2.8 (5) K, respectively, see Fig. 13. Apparently, the gap size estimated using these two techniques: bulk (Specific heat) and local ( $^{31}\text{P}$  - NMR) probes is quite consistent and we believe that the gap size estimated using NMR is much more precise as the NMR transitions are constrained by the selection rules ( $\Delta m = 1$ ) imposed by the magnetic dipole transitions, on the contrary, the specific heat yields an average value of gap, therefore it sets an upper-bound to the gap size. Interestingly, the gap,  $\Delta_N$ , estimated by NMR technique in  $B \rightarrow 0$  limit has an intercept value close to the mean-field temperature scale  $\sim 2.88$  K, which essentially implies the size of

the internal field developed as a result of magnetic ordering. For fields above  $B \geq 3$  T, the external field takes over and the gap scales linearly with the applied field.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, we have investigated the structural and physical properties of a kagomé material, LCPO, using x-ray diffraction & neutron diffraction, thermodynamic, and  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR measurements. Even though LCPO is isostructural to LFPO, the ground state of LCPO is in stark contrast to LFPO and does not show the effect of frustration (offered by the kagomé network) and relatively stronger quantum fluctuations than LFPO as a result of reduced spin quantum number  $S = 3/2$ . The LCPO stabilizes a ferromagnetic like ground state with  $T_c = 2.7$  K, and the short-range correlations are found to survive above the mean-field temperature  $\Theta_{CW} \sim 3$  K. The presence of additional couplings ( $2^{nd}$  and  $3^{rd}$ ) turn the material away from a pure nearest Heisenberg kagomé ferromagnet. This structurally clean kagomé material is quite a rare example of an insulating ferromagnet, where the ferromagnetism is a spin-off of nn exchange interaction rather than the DM and dipolar interactions. The presence of highly degenerate flat bands in kagome lattice makes it conducive to hold the ferromagnetic state and the absence of DM interaction in LCPO could again protect the degeneracy of flat bands and thus the zero-energy excitations. In order to understand the role of these bands on the elementary excitations and in turn on the ground state, inelastic neutron scattering experiments could be of paramount importance.

#### Acknowledgments

RK thanks TIFR Mumbai for facilitating with the experimental facilities for conducting the initial research work. A.C acknowledges Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) National Postdoctoral Fellowship (PDF/2021/000346), India for financial support. P L thanks Sudhindra Rayaprol for conducting initial neutron diffraction measurements. We thank CC-IITK for providing the high performance computing facility. This work is partly supported by the JSPS Grant-in Aid for Scientific Research (Grant Nos 19H01832, 20K20892, 21H01035, 22H04458) and the ISSP Institutional Collaborative Research Program.

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to compare with the NMR gap size.