

# Lanthanide and Actinide Chemistry

**Simon Cotton**

*Uppingham School, Uppingham, Rutland, UK*



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# Lanthanide and Actinide Chemistry

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In memory of Ray and Derek Cotton, my parents.

*Remember that it was of your parents you were born;  
how can you repay what they have given to you?*

*(Ecclesiasticus 7.28 RSV)*

also in memory of María de los Ángeles Santiago Hernández,  
a lovely lady and devout Catholic, who died far too young.

and to Lisa.





Dr Simon Cotton obtained his PhD at Imperial College London. After postdoctoral research and teaching appointments at Queen Mary College, London, and the University of East Anglia, he has taught chemistry in several different schools, and has been at Uppingham School since 1996. From 1984 until 1997, he was Editor of Lanthanide and Actinide Compounds for the *Dictionary of Organometallic Compounds* and the *Dictionary of Inorganic Compounds*. He authored the account of Lanthanide Coordination Chemistry for the 2nd edition of *Comprehensive Coordination Chemistry* (Pergamon) as well as the accounts of Lanthanide Inorganic and Coordination Chemistry for both the 1st and 2nd editions of the *Encyclopedia of Inorganic Chemistry* (Wiley).

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# Contents

Preface . . . . .	xv
<b>1 Introduction to the Lanthanides . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction . . . . .	1
1.2 Characteristics of the Lanthanides . . . . .	2
1.3 The Occurrence and Abundance of the Lanthanides . . . . .	2
1.4 Lanthanide Ores . . . . .	3
1.5 Extracting and Separating the Lanthanides . . . . .	3
1.5.1 Extraction . . . . .	3
1.5.2 Separating the Lanthanides . . . . .	4
1.6 The Position of the Lanthanides in the Periodic Table . . . . .	6
1.7 The Lanthanide Contraction . . . . .	7
<b>2 The Lanthanides – Principles and Energetics . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Electron Configurations of the Lanthanides and f Orbitals . . . . .	9
2.2 What do f Orbitals Look Like? . . . . .	10
2.3 How f Orbitals affect Properties of the Lanthanides . . . . .	10
2.4 The Lanthanide Contraction . . . . .	11
2.5 Electron Configurations of the Lanthanide Elements and of Common Ions . . . . .	12
2.6 Patterns in Ionization Energies . . . . .	12
2.7 Atomic and Ionic Radii . . . . .	14
2.8 Patterns in Hydration Energies (Enthalpies) for the Lanthanide Ions . . . . .	14
2.9 Enthalpy Changes for the Formation of Simple Lanthanide Compounds . . . . .	14
2.9.1 Stability of Tetrahalides . . . . .	14
2.9.2 Stability of Dihalides . . . . .	17
2.9.3 Stability of Aqua Ions . . . . .	18
2.10 Patterns in Redox Potentials . . . . .	19
<b>3 The Lanthanide Elements and Simple Binary Compounds . . . . .</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Introduction . . . . .	23
3.2 The Elements . . . . .	23
3.2.1 Properties . . . . .	23
3.2.2 Synthesis . . . . .	24
3.2.3 Alloys and Uses of the Metals . . . . .	25
3.3 Binary Compounds . . . . .	25
3.3.1 Trihalides . . . . .	25
3.3.2 Tetrahalides . . . . .	27
3.3.3 Dihalides . . . . .	28
3.3.4 Oxides . . . . .	29

3.4	Borides . . . . .	31
3.5	Carbides . . . . .	31
3.6	Nitrides . . . . .	31
3.7	Hydrides . . . . .	31
3.8	Sulfides . . . . .	32
<b>4</b>	<b>Coordination Chemistry of the Lanthanides . . . . .</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1	Introduction . . . . .	35
4.2	Stability of Complexes . . . . .	35
4.3	Complexes . . . . .	37
4.3.1	The Aqua Ions . . . . .	37
4.3.2	Hydrated Salts . . . . .	37
4.3.3	Other O-Donors . . . . .	38
4.3.4	Complexes of $\beta$ -Diketonates . . . . .	39
4.3.5	Lewis Base Adducts of $\beta$ -Diketonate Complexes . . . . .	41
4.3.6	Nitrate Complexes . . . . .	41
4.3.7	Crown Ether Complexes . . . . .	41
4.3.8	Complexes of EDTA and Related Ligands . . . . .	42
4.3.9	Complexes of N-Donors . . . . .	43
4.3.10	Complexes of Porphyrins and Related Systems . . . . .	44
4.3.11	Halide Complexes . . . . .	46
4.3.12	Complexes of S-Donors . . . . .	46
4.4	Alkoxides, Alkylamides and Related Substances . . . . .	47
4.4.1	Alkylamides . . . . .	47
4.4.2	Alkoxides . . . . .	48
4.4.3	Thiolates . . . . .	50
4.5	Coordination Numbers in Lanthanide Complexes . . . . .	50
4.5.1	General Principles . . . . .	50
4.5.2	Examples of the Coordination Numbers . . . . .	51
4.5.3	The Lanthanide Contraction and Coordination Numbers . . . . .	53
4.5.4	Formulae and Coordination Numbers . . . . .	54
4.6	The Coordination Chemistry of the +2 and +4 States . . . . .	54
4.6.1	The (+2) State . . . . .	55
4.6.2	The (+4) State . . . . .	56
<b>5</b>	<b>Electronic and Magnetic Properties of the Lanthanides . . . . .</b>	<b>61</b>
5.1	Magnetic and Spectroscopic Properties of the $\text{Ln}^{3+}$ Ions . . . . .	61
5.2	Magnetic Properties of the $\text{Ln}^{3+}$ Ions . . . . .	62
5.2.1	Adiabatic Demagnetization . . . . .	65
5.3	Energy Level Diagrams for the Lanthanide Ions, and their Electronic Spectra . . . . .	65
5.3.1	Electronic Spectra . . . . .	66
5.3.2	Hypersensitive Transitions . . . . .	68
5.4	Luminescence Spectra . . . . .	69
5.4.1	Quenching . . . . .	73
5.4.2	Antenna Effects . . . . .	73
5.4.3	Applications of Luminescence to Sensory Probes . . . . .	74
5.4.4	Fluorescence and TV . . . . .	75
5.4.5	Lighting Applications . . . . .	76

5.4.6	Lasers . . . . .	76
5.4.7	Euro Banknotes . . . . .	77
5.5	NMR Applications . . . . .	77
5.5.1	$\beta$ -Diketonates as NMR Shift Reagents . . . . .	77
5.5.2	Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) . . . . .	78
5.5.3	What Makes a Good MRI Agent? . . . . .	79
5.5.4	Texaphyrins . . . . .	81
5.6	Electron Paramagnetic Resonance Spectroscopy . . . . .	82
5.7	Lanthanides as Probes in Biological Systems . . . . .	83
<b>6</b>	<b>Organometallic Chemistry of the Lanthanides . . . . .</b>	<b>89</b>
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	89
6.2	The +3 Oxidation State . . . . .	89
6.2.1	Alkyls . . . . .	89
6.2.2	Aryls . . . . .	90
6.3	Cyclopentadienyls . . . . .	91
6.3.1	Compounds of the Unsubstituted Cyclopentadienyl Ligand ( $C_5H_5 = Cp$ ; $C_5Me_5 = Cp^*$ ) . . . . .	91
6.3.2	Compounds [ $LnCp^*_3$ ] ( $Cp^* =$ Pentamethylcyclopentadienyl) . . . . .	94
6.3.3	Bis(cyclopentadienyl) Alkyls and Aryls $LnCp_2R$ . . . . .	95
6.3.4	Bis(pentamethylcyclopentadienyl) Alkyls . . . . .	96
6.3.5	Hydride Complexes . . . . .	98
6.4	Cyclooctatetraene Dianion Complexes . . . . .	98
6.5	The +2 State . . . . .	99
6.5.1	Alkyls and Aryls . . . . .	99
6.5.2	Cyclopentadienyls . . . . .	100
6.5.3	Other Compounds . . . . .	100
6.6	The +4 State . . . . .	101
6.7	Metal–Arene Complexes . . . . .	101
6.8	Carbonyls . . . . .	102
<b>7</b>	<b>The Misfits: Scandium, Yttrium, and Promethium . . . . .</b>	<b>107</b>
7.1	Introduction . . . . .	107
7.2	Scandium . . . . .	107
7.2.1	Binary Compounds of Scandium . . . . .	108
7.3	Coordination Compounds of Scandium . . . . .	108
7.3.1	The Aqua Ion and Hydrated Salts . . . . .	108
7.3.2	Other Complexes . . . . .	109
7.3.3	Alkoxides and Alkylamides . . . . .	111
7.3.4	Patterns in Coordination Number . . . . .	112
7.4	Organometallic Compounds of Scandium . . . . .	114
7.5	Yttrium . . . . .	114
7.6	Promethium . . . . .	115
<b>8</b>	<b>The Lanthanides and Scandium in Organic Chemistry . . . . .</b>	<b>121</b>
8.1	Introduction . . . . .	121
8.2	Cerium(IV) Compounds . . . . .	121
8.2.1	Oxidation of Aromatics . . . . .	121
8.2.2	Oxidation of Alkenes . . . . .	123
8.2.3	Oxidation of Alcohols . . . . .	123

8.3	Samarium(II) Iodide, $\text{SmI}_2$ . . . . .	124
8.3.1	Reduction of Halogen Compounds . . . . .	124
8.3.2	Reduction of $\alpha$ -Heterosubstituted Ketones . . . . .	124
8.3.3	Reductions of Carbonyl Groups . . . . .	124
8.3.4	Barbier Reactions . . . . .	126
8.3.5	Reformatsky Reactions . . . . .	127
8.4	Lanthanide $\beta$ -Diketonates as Diels–Alder Catalysts . . . . .	127
8.4.1	Hetero-Diels–Alder Reactions . . . . .	128
8.5	Cerium(III) Chloride and Organocerium Compounds . . . . .	128
8.6	Cerium(III) Chloride and Metal Hydrides . . . . .	130
8.7	Scandium Triflate and Lanthanide Triflates . . . . .	131
8.7.1	Friedel–Crafts Reactions . . . . .	131
8.7.2	Diels–Alder Reactions . . . . .	132
8.7.3	Mannich Reactions . . . . .	132
8.7.4	Imino-Diels–Alder Reactions . . . . .	133
8.8	Alkoxides and Aryloxides . . . . .	134
8.9	Lanthanide Metals . . . . .	135
8.10	Organometallics and Catalysis . . . . .	136
<b>9</b>	<b>Introduction to the Actinides . . . . .</b>	<b>145</b>
9.1	Introduction and Occurrence of the Actinides . . . . .	145
9.2	Synthesis . . . . .	145
9.3	Extraction of Th, Pa, and U . . . . .	147
9.3.1	Extraction of Thorium . . . . .	147
9.3.2	Extraction of Protactinium . . . . .	148
9.3.3	Extraction and Purification of Uranium . . . . .	148
9.4	Uranium Isotope Separation . . . . .	148
9.4.1	Gaseous Diffusion . . . . .	148
9.4.2	Gas Centrifuge . . . . .	148
9.4.3	Electromagnetic Separation . . . . .	149
9.4.4	Laser Separation . . . . .	149
9.5	Characteristics of the Actinides . . . . .	149
9.6	Reduction Potentials of the Actinides . . . . .	150
9.7	Relativistic Effects . . . . .	152
<b>10</b>	<b>Binary Compounds of the Actinides . . . . .</b>	<b>155</b>
10.1	Introduction . . . . .	155
10.2	Halides . . . . .	155
10.2.1	Syntheses . . . . .	156
10.2.2	Structure Types . . . . .	158
10.3	Thorium Halides . . . . .	159
10.4	Uranium Halides . . . . .	160
10.4.1	Uranium(VI) Compounds . . . . .	161
10.4.2	Uranium(V) Compounds . . . . .	161
10.4.3	Uranium (IV) Compounds . . . . .	161
10.4.4	Uranium(III) Compounds . . . . .	163
10.4.5	Uranium Hexafluoride and Isotope Separation . . . . .	163

10.5	The Actinide Halides (Ac–Am) excluding U and Th . . . . .	165
10.5.1	Actinium . . . . .	165
10.5.2	Protactinium . . . . .	165
10.5.3	Neptunium . . . . .	166
10.5.4	Plutonium . . . . .	166
10.5.5	Americium . . . . .	167
10.6	Halides of the Heavier Transactinides . . . . .	168
10.6.1	Curium(III) Chloride . . . . .	168
10.6.2	Californium(III) Chloride, Californium(III) Iodide, and Californium(II) Iodide . . . . .	168
10.6.3	Einsteinium(III) Chloride . . . . .	168
10.7	Oxides . . . . .	169
10.7.1	Thorium Oxide . . . . .	169
10.7.2	Uranium Oxides . . . . .	169
10.8	Uranium Hydride $\text{UH}_3$ . . . . .	170
10.9	Oxyhalides . . . . .	170
<b>11</b>	<b>Coordination Chemistry of the Actinides . . . . .</b>	<b>173</b>
11.1	Introduction . . . . .	173
11.2	General Patterns in the Coordination Chemistry of the Actinides . . . . .	173
11.3	Coordination Numbers in Actinide Complexes . . . . .	174
11.4	Types of Complex Formed . . . . .	174
11.5	Uranium and Thorium Chemistry . . . . .	175
11.5.1	Uranyl Complexes . . . . .	175
11.5.2	Coordination Numbers and Geometries in Uranyl Complexes . . . . .	177
11.5.3	Some Other Complexes . . . . .	178
11.5.4	Uranyl Nitrate and its Complexes; their Role in Processing Nuclear Waste . . . . .	179
11.5.5	Nuclear Waste Processing . . . . .	179
11.6	Complexes of the Actinide(IV) Nitrates and Halides . . . . .	180
11.6.1	Thorium Nitrate Complexes . . . . .	180
11.6.2	Uranium(IV) Nitrate Complexes . . . . .	180
11.6.3	Complexes of the Actinide(IV) Halides . . . . .	181
11.7	Thiocyanates . . . . .	183
11.8	Amides, Alkoxides and Thiolates . . . . .	184
11.8.1	Amide Chemistry . . . . .	184
11.8.2	Alkoxides and Aryloxides . . . . .	185
11.9	Chemistry of Actinium . . . . .	186
11.10	Chemistry of Protactinium . . . . .	187
11.11	Chemistry of Neptunium . . . . .	188
11.11.1	Complexes of Neptunium . . . . .	188
11.12	Chemistry of Plutonium . . . . .	189
11.12.1	Aqueous Chemistry . . . . .	189
11.12.2	The Stability of the Oxidation States of Plutonium . . . . .	190
11.12.3	Coordination Chemistry of Plutonium . . . . .	191
11.12.4	Plutonium in the Environment . . . . .	193
11.13	Chemistry of Americium and Subsequent Actinides . . . . .	195
11.13.1	Potentials . . . . .	195
11.14	Chemistry of the Later Actinides . . . . .	196

<b>12</b>	<b>Electronic and Magnetic Properties of the Actinides</b>	201
12.1	Introduction	201
12.2	Absorption Spectra	202
12.2.1	Uranium(VI) – $\text{UO}_2^{2+}$ – $f^0$	202
12.2.2	Uranium(V) – $f^1$	203
12.2.3	Uranium(IV) – $f^2$	204
12.2.4	Spectra of the Later Actinides	206
12.3	Magnetic Properties	207
<b>13</b>	<b>Organometallic Chemistry of the Actinides</b>	209
13.1	Introduction	209
13.2	Simple $\sigma$ -Bonded Organometallics	209
13.3	Cyclopentadienyls	211
13.3.1	Oxidation State (VI)	211
13.3.2	Oxidation State (V)	211
13.3.3	Oxidation State (IV)	211
13.3.4	Oxidation State (III)	214
13.4	Compounds of the Pentamethylcyclopentadienyl Ligand ( $\text{C}_5\text{Me}_5 = \text{Cp}^*$ )	215
13.4.1	Oxidation State(IV)	215
13.4.2	Cationic Species and Catalysts	216
13.4.3	Hydrides	217
13.4.4	Oxidation State (III)	218
13.5	Tris(pentamethylcyclopentadienyl) Systems	219
13.6	Other Metallacycles	219
13.7	Cyclooctatetraene Dianion Compounds	219
13.8	Arene Complexes	221
13.9	Carbonyls	222
<b>14</b>	<b>Synthesis of the Transactinides and their Chemistry</b>	225
14.1	Introduction	225
14.2	Finding New Elements	226
14.3	Synthesis of the Transactinides	226
14.4	Naming the Transactinides	229
14.5	Predicting Electronic Arrangements	230
14.6	Identifying the Elements	230
14.7	Predicting Chemistry of the Transactinides	233
14.8	What is known about the Chemistry of the Transactinides	234
14.8.1	Element 104	234
14.8.2	Element 105	234
14.8.3	Element 106	234
14.8.4	Element 107	235
14.8.5	Element 108	235
14.9	And the Future?	236
	<b>Bibliography</b>	237
	<b>Index</b>	253



# Preface

This book is aimed at providing a sound introduction to the chemistry of the lanthanides, actinides and transactinides to undergraduate students. I hope that it will also be of value to teachers of these courses. Whilst not being anything resembling a comprehensive monograph, it does attempt to give a factual basis to the area, and the reader can use a fairly comprehensive bibliography to range further.

Since I wrote a previous book in this area (1991), the reader may wonder why on earth I have bothered again. The world of f-block chemistry has moved on. It is one of active and important research, with names like Bünzli, Evans, Ephritikhine, Lappert, Marks and Parker familiar world-wide (I am conscious of names omitted). Not only have several more elements been synthesized (and claims made for others), but lanthanides and their compounds are routinely employed in many areas of synthetic organic chemistry; gadolinium compounds find routine application in MRI scans; and there are other spectroscopic applications, notably in luminescence. Whilst some areas are hardly changed, at this level at least (e.g. actinide magnetism and spectroscopy), a lot more compounds have been described, accounting for the length of the chapters on coordination and organometallic chemistry. I have tried to spell out the energetics of lanthanide chemistry in more detail, whilst I have provided some end-of-chapter questions, of variable difficulty, which may prove useful for tutorials. I have supplied most, but not all, of the answers to these (my answers, which are not always definitive).

It is a pleasure to thank all those who have contributed to the book: Professor Derek Woollins, for much encouragement at different stages of the project; Professor James Anderson, for many valuable comments on Chapter 8; Martyn Berry, who supplied valuable comment on early versions of several chapters; to Professors Michel Ephritikhine, Allan White and Jack Harrowfield, and Dr J.A.G. Williams, and many others, for exchanging e-mails, correspondence and ideas. I'm very grateful to Dr Mary P. Neu for much information on plutonium. The staff of the Libraries of the Chemistry Department of Cambridge University and of the Royal Society of Chemistry, as well as the British Library, have been quite indispensable in helping with access to the primary literature. I would also wish to thank a number of friends – once again Dr Alan Hart, who got me interested in lanthanides in the first place; Professor James Anderson (again), Dr Andrew Platt, Dr John Fawcett, and Professor Paul Raithby, for continued research collaboration and obtaining spectra and structures from unpromising crystals, so that I have kept a toe-hold in the area. Over the last 8 years, a number of Uppingham 6th form students have contributed to my efforts in lanthanide coordination chemistry – John Bower, Oliver Noy, Rachel How, Vilius Franckevicius, Leon Catallo, Franz Niecknig, Victoria Fisher, Alex Tait and Joanna Harris. Finally, thanks are most certainly due to Dom Paul-Emmanuel Clénet and the Benedictine community of the Abbey of Bec, for continued hospitality during several Augusts when I have been compiling the book.

Simon Cotton



# 1 Introduction to the Lanthanides

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand that lanthanides differ in their properties from the s- and d-block metals;
- recall characteristic properties of these elements;
- appreciate reasons for their positioning in the Periodic Table;
- understand how the size of the lanthanide ions affects certain properties and how this can be used in the extraction and separation of the elements;
- understand how to obtain pure samples of individual  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  ions.

## 1.1 Introduction

Lanthanide chemistry started in Scandinavia. In 1794 Johann Gadolin succeeded in obtaining an 'earth'(oxide) from a black mineral subsequently known as gadolinite; he called the earth yttria. Soon afterwards, M.H. Klaproth, J.J. Berzelius and W. Hisinger obtained ceria, another earth, from cerite. However, it was not until 1839–1843 that the Swede C.G. Mosander first separated these earths into their component oxides; thus ceria was resolved into the oxides of cerium and lanthanum and a mixed oxide 'didymia' (a mixture of the oxides of the metals from Pr through Gd). The original yttria was similarly separated into substances called erbia, terbia, and yttria (though some 40 years later, the first two names were to be reversed!). This kind of confusion was made worse by the fact that the newly discovered means of spectroscopic analysis permitted misidentifications, so that around 70 'new' elements were erroneously claimed in the course of the century.

Nor was Mendeleev's revolutionary Periodic Table a help. When he first published his Periodic Table in 1869, he was able to include only lanthanum, cerium, didymium (now known to have been a mixture of Pr and Nd), another mixture in the form of erbia, and yttrium; unreliable information about atomic mass made correct positioning of these elements in the table difficult. Some had not yet been isolated as elements. There was no way of predicting how many of these elements there would be until Henry Moseley (1887–1915) analysed the X-ray spectra of elements and gave meaning to the concept of atomic number. He showed that there were 15 elements from lanthanum to lutetium (which had only been identified in 1907). The discovery of radioactive promethium had to wait until after World War 2.

It was the pronounced similarity of the lanthanides to each other, especially each to its neighbours (a consequence of their general adoption of the +3 oxidation state in aqueous solution), that caused their classification and eventual separation to be an extremely difficult undertaking.

Subsequently it was not until the work of Bohr and of Moseley that it was known precisely how many of these elements there were. Most current versions of the Periodic Table place lanthanum under scandium and yttrium.

## 1.2 Characteristics of the Lanthanides

The lanthanides exhibit a number of features in their chemistry that differentiate them from the d-block metals. The reactivity of the elements is greater than that of the transition metals, akin to the Group II metals:

1. A very wide range of coordination numbers (generally 6–12, but numbers of 2, 3 or 4 are known).
2. Coordination geometries are determined by ligand steric factors rather than crystal field effects.
3. They form labile ‘ionic’ complexes that undergo facile exchange of ligand.
4. The 4f orbitals in the  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  ion do not participate directly in bonding, being well shielded by the  $5s^2$  and  $5p^6$  orbitals. Their spectroscopic and magnetic properties are thus largely uninfluenced by the ligand.
5. Small crystal-field splittings and very sharp electronic spectra in comparison with the d-block metals.
6. They prefer anionic ligands with donor atoms of rather high electronegativity (e.g. O, F).
7. They readily form hydrated complexes (on account of the high hydration energy of the small  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  ion) and this can cause uncertainty in assigning coordination numbers.
8. Insoluble hydroxides precipitate at neutral pH unless complexing agents are present.
9. The chemistry is largely that of one (3+) oxidation state (certainly in aqueous solution).
10. They do not form  $\text{Ln}=\text{O}$  or  $\text{Ln}\equiv\text{N}$  multiple bonds of the type known for many transition metals and certain actinides.
11. Unlike the transition metals, they do not form stable carbonyls and have (virtually) no chemistry in the 0 oxidation state.

## 1.3 The Occurrence and Abundance of the Lanthanides

Table 1.1 presents the abundance of the lanthanides in the earth’s crust and in the solar system as a whole. (Although not in the same units, the values in each list are internally consistent.)

Two patterns emerge from these data. First, that the lighter lanthanides are more abundant than the heavier ones; secondly, that the elements with even atomic number are more abundant than those with odd atomic number. Overall, cerium, the most abundant lanthanide

**Table 1.1** Abundance of the lanthanides

	La	Ce	Pr	Nd	Pm	Sm	Eu	Gd	Tb	Dy	Ho	Er	Tm	Yb	Lu	Y
Crust (ppm)	35	66	9.1	40	0.0	7	2.1	6.1	1.2	4.5	1.3	3.5	0.5	3.1	0.8	31
Solar System (with respect to $10^7$ atoms Si)	4.5	1.2	1.7	8.5	0.0	2.5	1.0	3.3	0.6	3.9	0.9	2.5	0.4	2.4	0.4	40.0

on earth, has a similar crustal concentration to the lighter Ni and Cu, whilst even Tm and Lu, the rarest lanthanides, are more abundant than Bi, Ag or the platinum metals.

The abundances are a consequence of how the elements were synthesized by atomic fusion in the cores of stars with heavy elements only made in supernovae. Synthesis of heavier nuclei requires higher temperature and pressures and so gets progressively harder as the atomic number increases. The odd/even alternation (often referred to as the Oddo–Harkins rule) is again general, and reflects the facts that elements with odd mass numbers have larger nuclear capture cross sections and are more likely to take up another neutron, so elements with odd atomic number (and hence odd mass number) are less common than those with even mass number. Even-atomic-number nuclei are more stable when formed.

## 1.4 Lanthanide Ores

Principal sources (Table 1.2) are the following:

Bastnasite  $\text{LnFCO}_3$ ; Monazite  $(\text{Ln}, \text{Th})\text{PO}_4$  (richer in earlier lanthanides); Xenotime  $(\text{Y}, \text{Ln})\text{PO}_4$  (richer in later lanthanides). In addition to these, there are Chinese rare earth reserves which amount to over 70% of the known world total, mainly in the form of the ionic ores from southern provinces. These Chinese ion-absorption ores, weathered granites with lanthanides adsorbed onto the surface of aluminium silicates, are in some cases low in cerium and rich in the heavier lanthanides (Longnan) whilst the Xunwu deposits are rich in the lighter metals; the small particle size makes them easy to mine. The Chinese ores have made them a leading player in lanthanide chemistry.

**Table 1.2** Typical abundance of the lanthanides in ores<sup>a</sup>

%	La	Ce	Pr	Nd	Pm	Sm	Eu	Gd	Tb	Dy	Ho	Er	Tm	Yb	Lu	Y
Monazite	20	43	4.5	16	0	3	0.1	1.5	0.05	0.6	0.05	0.2	0.02	0.1	0.02	2.5
Bastnasite	33.2	49.1	4.3	12	0	0.8	0.12	0.17	<b>160</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	0.1
Xenotime	0.5	5	0.7	2.2	0	1.9	0.2	4	1	8.6	2	5.4	0.9	6.2	0.4	60.0

<sup>a</sup>Bold values are in ppm.

## 1.5 Extracting and Separating the Lanthanides

These two processes are not necessarily coterminous. Whilst electronic, optical and magnetic applications require individual pure lanthanides, the greatest quantity of lanthanides is used as mixtures, e.g. in mischmetal or oxide catalysts.

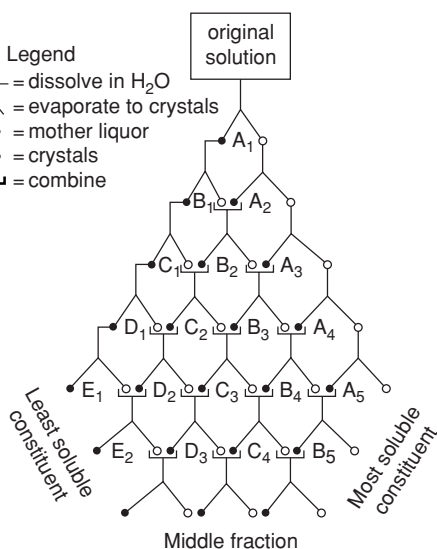
### 1.5.1 Extraction

After initial concentration by crushing, grinding and froth flotation, bastnasite is treated with 10% HCl to remove calcite, by which time the mixture contains around 70% lanthanide oxides. This is roasted to oxidize the cerium content to  $\text{Ce}^{\text{IV}}$ ; on further extraction with HCl, the Ce remains as  $\text{CeO}_2$ , whilst the lanthanides in the (+3) state dissolve as a solution of the chlorides.

Monazite is usually treated with NaOH at 150 °C to remove phosphate as  $\text{Na}_3\text{PO}_4$ , leaving a mixture of the hydrated oxides, which are dissolved in boiling HCl at pH 3.5, separating the lanthanides from insoluble  $\text{ThO}_2$ . Sulfuric acid can also be used to dissolve the lanthanides.

### 1.5.2 Separating the Lanthanides

These can be divided into four types: chemical separations, fractional crystallization, ion-exchange methods and solvent extraction. Of these, only the last-named is used on a commercial scale (apart from initial separation of cerium). Chemical separations rely on using stabilities of unusual oxidation states; thus  $\text{Eu}^{2+}$  is the only ion in that oxidation state formed on reduction by zinc amalgam and can then be precipitated as  $\text{EuSO}_4$  (note the similarity with heavier Group 2 metals). Repeated (and tedious) fractional crystallization, which made use of slight solubility differences between the salts of neighbouring lanthanides, such as the bromates  $\text{Ln}(\text{BrO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , ethyl sulfates and double nitrates, were once the only possible way of obtaining pure lanthanides, as with the 15 000 recrystallizations carried out by the American C. James to get pure thulium bromate (1911) (Figure 1.1 indicates the principle of this method).

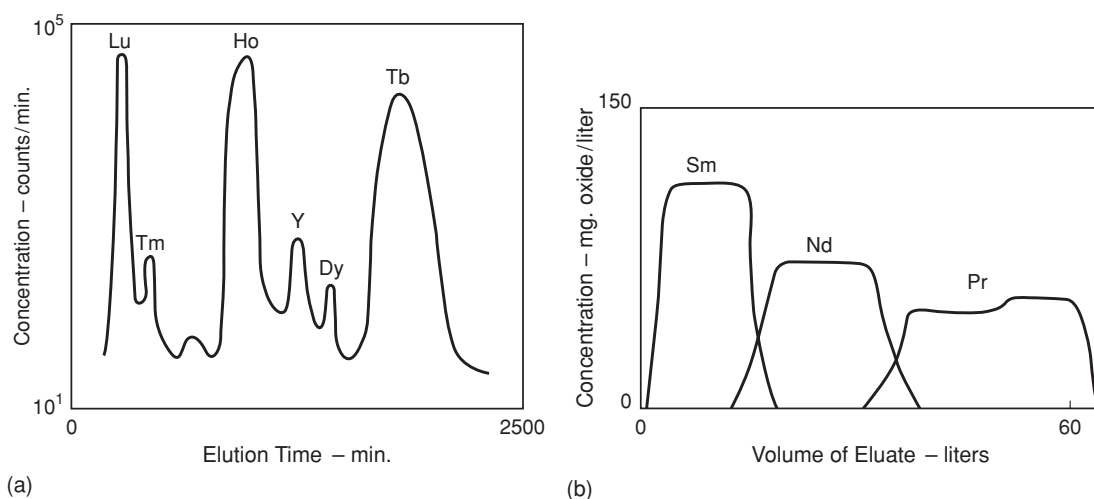


**Figure 1.1**

Diagrammatic representation of the system of fractional crystallization used to separate salts of the rare-earth elements (reproduced with permission from D.M. Yost, H. Russell and C.S. Garner, *The Rare Earth Elements and their Compounds*, John Wiley, 1947.)

Ion-exchange chromatography is not of real commercial importance for large-scale production, but historically it was the method by which fast high-purity separation of the lanthanides first became feasible. As radioactive lanthanide isotopes are important fission products of the fission of  $^{235}\text{U}$  and therefore need to be separated from uranium, and because the actinides after plutonium tend to resemble the lanthanides, the development of the technique followed on the Manhattan project. It was found that if  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  ions were adsorbed at the top of a cation-exchange resin, then treated with a complexing agent such as buffered citric acid, then the cations tended to be eluted in reverse atomic number order (Figure 1.2a); the anionic ligand binds most strongly to the heaviest (and smallest) cation, which has the highest charge density. A disadvantage of this approach when scaled up to high concentration is that the peaks tend to overlap (Figure 1.2b).

It was subsequently found that amine polycarboxylates such as  $\text{EDTA}^{4-}$  gave stronger complexes and much better separations. In practice, some  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions ('retainer') are added to prevent precipitation of either the free acid  $\text{H}_4\text{EDTA}$  or the lanthanide complex

**Figure 1.2**

(a) Cation-exchange chromatography of lanthanides, (b) overlap of peaks at high concentration. (a) Tracer-scale elution with 5% citrate at pH 3.20 (redrawn from B.H. Ketelle and G.E. Boyd, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 1947, **69**, 2800). (b) Macro-scale elution with 0.1% citrate at pH 5.30 (redrawn from F.H. Spedding, E.I. Fulmer, J.E. Powell, and T.A. Butler, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 1950, **72**, 2354). Reprinted with permission of the American Chemical Society ©1978.

HLn(EDTA).*x*H<sub>2</sub>O on the resin. The major disadvantage of this method is that it is a slow process for large-scale separations.

Solvent extraction has come to be used for the initial stage of the separation process, to give material with up to 99.9% purity. In 1949, it was found that Ce<sup>4+</sup> could readily be separated from Ln<sup>3+</sup> ions by extraction from a solution in nitric acid into tributyl phosphate [(BuO)<sub>3</sub>PO]. Subsequently the process was extended to separating the lanthanides, using a non-polar organic solvent such as kerosene and an extractant such as (BuO)<sub>3</sub>PO or bis (2-ethylhexyl)phosphinic acid [[C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>9</sub>CH(C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>)<sub>2</sub>P=O(OH)] to extract the lanthanides from aqueous nitrate solutions. The heavier lanthanides form complexes which are more soluble in the aqueous layer. After the two immiscible solvents have been agitated together and separated, the organic layer is treated with acid and the lanthanide extracted. The solvent is recycled and the aqueous layer put through further stages.

For a lanthanide Ln<sub>A</sub> distributed between two phases, a distribution coefficient *D*<sub>A</sub> is defined:

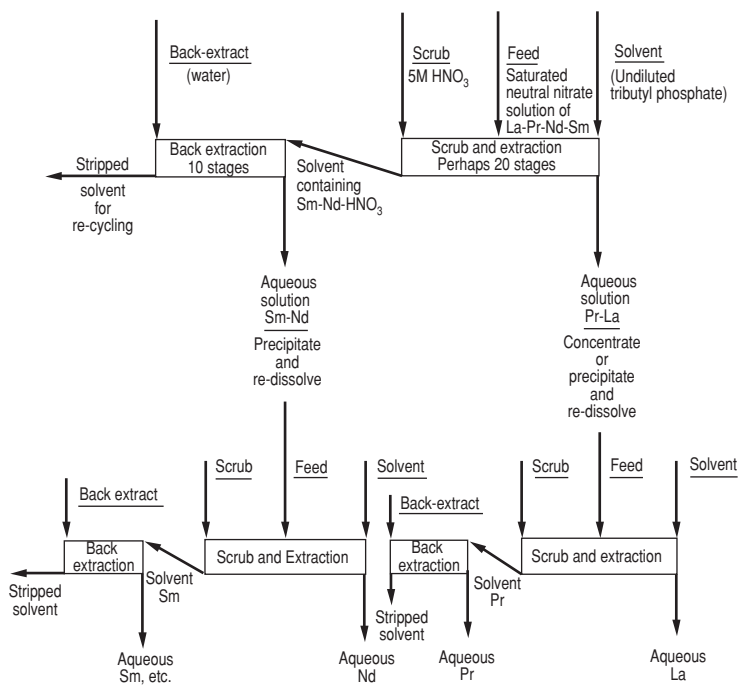
$$D_A = [\text{Ln}_A \text{ in organic phase}] / [\text{Ln}_A \text{ in aqueous phase}]$$

For two lanthanides Ln<sub>A</sub> and Ln<sub>B</sub> in a mixture being separated, a separation factor β<sub>B</sub><sup>A</sup> can be defined, where

$$\beta_B^A = D_A / D_B$$

β is very close to unity for two adjacent lanthanides in the Periodic Table (obviously, the larger β is, the better the separation).

In practice this process is run using an automated continuous counter-current circuit in which the organic solvent flows in the opposite direction to the aqueous layer containing the lanthanides. An equilibrium is set up between the lanthanide ions in the aqueous phase and the organic layer, with there tending to be a relative enhancement of the concentration of the heavier lanthanides in the organic layer. Because the separation between adjacent



**Figure 1.3**

Schematic diagram of lanthanide separation by solvent extraction. From R.J. Callow, *The Rare Earth Industry*, Pergamon, 1966; reproduced by permission.

lanthanides in each exchange is relatively slight, over a thousand exchanges are used (see Figure 1.3). This method affords lanthanides of purity up to the 99.9% purity level and is thus well suited to large-scale separation, the products being suited to ordinary chemical use. However, for electronic or spectroscopic use ('phosphor grade') 99.999% purity is necessary, and currently ion-exchange is used for final purification to these levels. The desired lanthanides are precipitated as the oxalate or hydroxide and converted into the oxides (the standard starting material for many syntheses) by thermal decomposition.

Various other separation methods have been described, one recent one involving the use of supercritical carbon dioxide at 40 °C and 100 atm to convert the lanthanides into their carbonates whilst the quadrivalent metals (e.g. Th and Ce) remain as their oxides.

## 1.6 The Position of the Lanthanides in the Periodic Table

As already mentioned, neither Mendeleev nor his successors could 'place' the lanthanides in the Periodic Table. Not only was there no recognizable atomic theory until many years afterwards, but, more relevant to how groupings of elements were made in those days, there was no comparable block of elements for making comparisons. The lanthanides were *sui generis*. The problem was solved by the combined (but separate) efforts of Moseley and Bohr, the former showing that La–Lu was composed of 15 elements with atomic numbers from 57 to 71, whilst the latter concluded that the fourth quantum shell could accommodate 32 electrons, and that the lanthanides were associated with placing electrons into the 4f orbitals.



The Periodic Table places elements in atomic number order, with the lanthanides falling between barium (56) and hafnium (72). For reasons of space, most present-day Periodic Tables are presented with Groups IIA and IVB (2 and 4) separated only by the Group IIIB (3) elements. Normally La (and Ac) are grouped with Sc and Y, but arguments have been advanced for an alternative format, in which Lu (and Lr) are grouped with Sc and Y (see e.g. W.B. Jensen, *J. Chem. Educ.*, 1982, **59**, 634) on the grounds that trends in properties (e.g. atomic radius, I.E., melting point) in the block Sc-Y-Lu parallel those in the Group Ti-Zr-Hf rather closely, and that there are resemblances in the structures of certain binary compounds. Certainly on size grounds, Lu resembles Y and Sc (it is intermediate in size between them) rather more than does La, owing to the effects of the 'lanthanide contraction'. The resemblances between Sc and Lu are, however, by no means complete.

## 1.7 The Lanthanide Contraction

The basic concept is that there is a decrease in radius of the lanthanide ion  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  on crossing the series from La to Lu. This is caused by the poor screening of the 4f electrons. This causes neighbouring lanthanides to have similar, but not identical, properties, and is discussed in more detail in Section 2.4.

**Question 1.1** Using the information you have been given in Section 1.2, draw up a table comparing (in three columns) the characteristic features of the s-block metals (use group 1 as typical) and the d-block transition metals.

**Answer 1.1** see Table 1.3 for one such comparison.

**Table 1.3** Comparison of 4f, 3d and Group I metals

	4f	3d	Group I
Electron configurations of ions	Variable	Variable	Noble gas
Stable oxidation states	Usually +3	Variable	1
Coordination numbers in complexes	Commonly 8–10	Usually 6	Often 4–6
Coordination polyhedra in complexes	Minimise repulsion	Directional	Minimise repulsion
Trends in coordination numbers	Often constant in block	Often constant in block	Increase down group
Donor atoms in complexes	'Hard' preferred	'Hard' and 'soft'	'Hard' preferred
Hydration energy	High	Usually moderate	Low
Ligand exchange reactions	Usually fast	Fast and slow	Fast
Magnetic properties of ions	Independent of environment	Depends on environment and ligand field	None
Electronic spectra of ions	Sharp lines	Broad lines	None
Crystal field effects in complexes	Weak	Strong	None
Organometallic compounds	Usually ionic, some with covalent character	Covalently bonded	Ionically bonded
Organometallics in low oxidation states	Few	Common	None
Multiply bonded atoms in complexes	None	Common	None



# 2 The Lanthanides – Principles and Energetics

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- recognise the difference between f-orbitals and other types of orbitals;
- understand that they are responsible for the particular properties of the lanthanides;
- give the electron configurations of the lanthanide elements and  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  ions;
- explain the reason for the lanthanide contraction;
- understand the effect of the lanthanide contraction upon properties of the lanthanides and subsequent elements;
- explain patterns in properties such as ionization and hydration energies;
- recall that lanthanides behave similarly when there is no change in the 4f electron population, but that they differ when the change involves a change in the number of 4f electrons;
- relate the stability of oxidation states to the ionization energies;
- calculate enthalpy changes for the formation of the aqua ions and of the lanthanide halides and relate these to the stability of particular compounds.

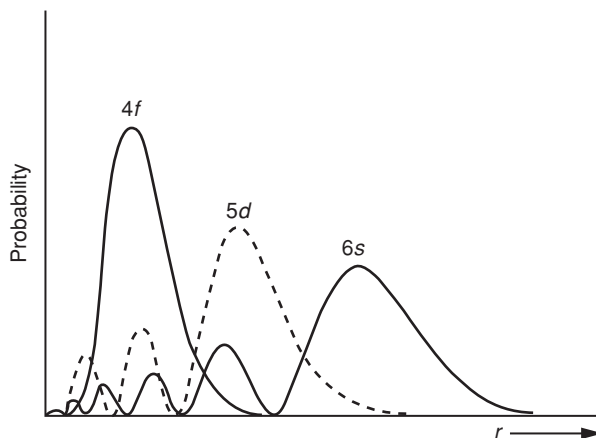
## 2.1 Electron Configurations of the Lanthanides and f Orbitals

The lanthanides (and actinides) are those in which the 4f (and 5f) orbitals are gradually filled. At lanthanum, the 5d subshell is lower in energy than 4f, so lanthanum has the electron configuration  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 5d^1$  (Table 2.1).

As more protons are added to the nucleus, the 4f orbitals contract rapidly and become more stable than the 5d (as the 4f orbitals penetrate the ‘xenon core’ more) (see Figure 2.1), so that Ce has the electron configuration  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 5d^1 4f^1$  and the trend continues with Pr having the arrangement  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 4f^3$ . This pattern continues for the metals Nd–Eu, all of which have configurations  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 4f^n$  ( $n = 4–7$ ). After europium, the stability of the half-filled f subshell is such that the next electron is added to the 5d orbital, Gd being  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 5d^1 4f^7$ ; at terbium, however, the earlier pattern is resumed, with Tb having the configuration  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 4f^9$ , and succeeding elements to ytterbium being  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 4f^n$  ( $n = 10–14$ ). The last lanthanide, lutetium, where the 4f subshell is now filled, is predictably  $[\text{Xe}] 6s^2 5d^1 4f^{14}$ .

**Table 2.1** Electron configurations of the lanthanides and their common ions

	Atom	$\text{Ln}^{3+}$	$\text{Ln}^{4+}$	$\text{Ln}^{2+}$
La	$[\text{Xe}] 5d^1 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}]$		
Ce	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^1 5d^1 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^1$	$[\text{Xe}]$	
Pr	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^3 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^1$	
Nd	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^4 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^3$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^4$
Pm	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^5 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^4$		
Sm	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^6 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^5$		$[\text{Xe}] 4f^6$
Eu	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^7 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^6$		$[\text{Xe}] 4f^7$
Gd	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^7 5d^1 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^7$		
Tb	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^9 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^8$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^7$	
Dy	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{10} 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^9$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^8$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{10}$
Ho	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{11} 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{10}$		
Er	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{12} 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{11}$		
Tm	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{13} 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{12}$		$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{13}$
Yb	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{14} 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{13}$		$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{14}$
Lu	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{14} 5d^1 6s^2$	$[\text{Xe}] 4f^{14}$		
Y	$[\text{Kr}] 4d^1 5s^2$	$[\text{Kr}]$		

**Figure 2.1**

The radial part of the hydrogenic wave functions for the 4f, 5d and 6s orbitals of cerium (after H.G. Friedman *et al. J. Chem. Educ.* 1964, **41**, 357). Reproduced by permission of the American Chemical Society © 1964.

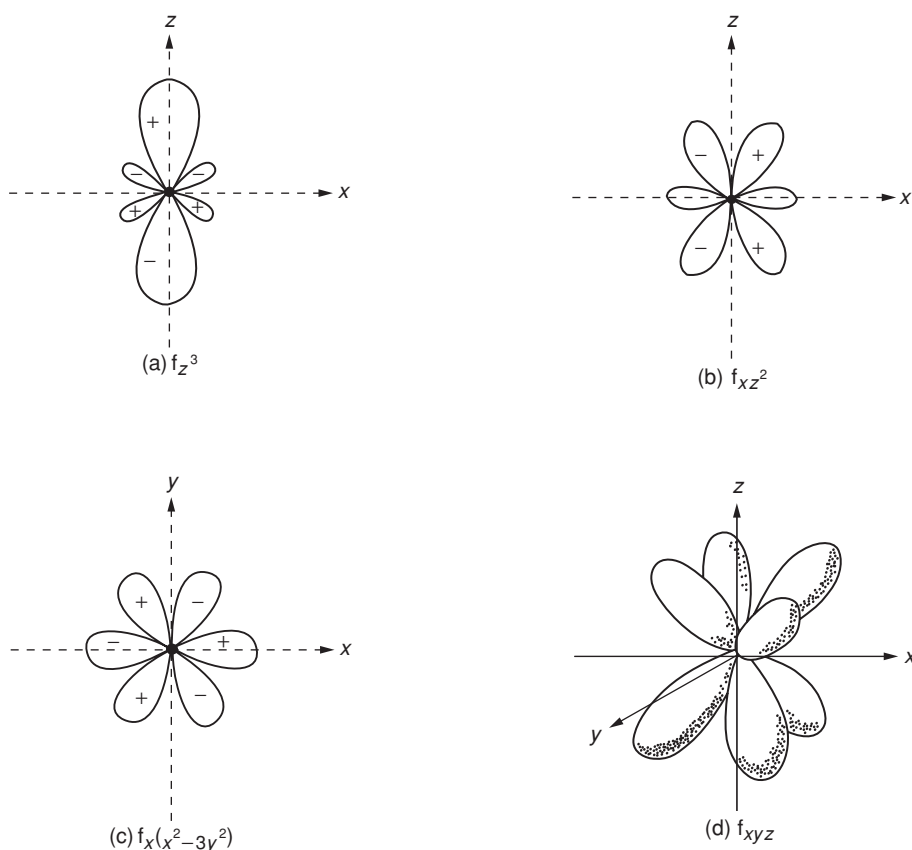
## 2.2 What do f Orbitals Look Like?

They are generally represented in one of two ways, either as a cubic set, or as a general set, depending upon which way the orbitals are combined. The cubic set comprises  $f_{xyz}$ ;  $f_{z(x^2-y^2)}$ ,  $f_{z(y^2-z^2)}$  and  $f_{y(z^2-x^2)}$ ;  $f_{z^3}$ ,  $f_{x^3}$  and  $f_{y^3}$ .

The general set, more useful in non-cubic environments, uses a different combination:  $f_{z^3}$ ;  $f_{xz^2}$  and  $f_{yz^2}$ ;  $f_{xyz}$ ;  $f_{z(x^2-y^2)}$ ,  $f_{x(x^2-3y^2)}$  and  $f_{y(3x^2-y^2)}$ ; Figure 2.2 shows the general set.

## 2.3 How f Orbitals affect Properties of the Lanthanides

The 4f orbitals penetrate the xenon core appreciably. Because of this, they cannot overlap with ligand orbitals and therefore do not participate significantly in bonding. As a result of

**Figure 2.2**

(a)  $f_z^3$ , ( $f_x^3$  and  $f_y^3$  are similar, extending along the  $x$ - and  $y$ -axes respectively); (b)  $f_{xz^2}$ , ( $f_{yz^2}$  is similar, produced by a  $90^\circ$  rotation about the  $z$ -axis); (c)  $f_{x(x^2-3y^2)}$ ,  $f_{y(3x^2-y^2)}$  is similar, formed by a  $90^\circ$  clockwise rotation round the  $z$ -axis); (d)  $f_{xyz}$ , ( $f_{xz^2-y^2}$ ),  $f_{y(z^2-y^2)}$  and  $f_{z(x^2-y^2)}$  are produced by a  $45^\circ$  rotation about the  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ -axes respectively). The cubic set comprises  $f_x^3$ ,  $f_y^3$ ,  $f_z^3$ ,  $f_{xyz}$ ,  $f_{x(z^2-y^2)}$ ,  $f_{y(z^2-x^2)}$  and  $f_{z(x^2-y^2)}$ ; the general set is made of  $f_z^3$ ,  $f_{xz^2}$ ,  $f_{yz^2}$ ,  $f_{xyz}$ ,  $f_{z(x^2-y^2)}$ ,  $f_{x(x^2-3y^2)}$  and  $f_{y(3x^2-y^2)}$ . (Reproduces with permission from S.A. Cotton, *Lanthanides and Actinides*, Macmillan, 1991).

their isolation from the influence of the ligands, crystal-field effects are very small (and can be regarded as a perturbation on the free-ion states) and thus electronic spectra and magnetic properties are essentially unaffected by environment. The ability to form  $\pi$  bonds is also absent, and thus there are none of the  $M=O$  or  $M\equiv N$  bonds found for transition metals (or, indeed, certain early actinides). The organometallic chemistry is appreciably different from that of transition metals, too.

## 2.4 The Lanthanide Contraction

As the series La–Lu is traversed, there is a decrease in both the atomic radii and in the radii of the  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$  ions, more markedly at the start of the series. The 4f electrons are ‘inside’ the 5s and 5p electrons and are core-like in their behaviour, being shielded from the ligands, thus taking no part in bonding, and having spectroscopic and magnetic properties largely independent of environment. The 5s and 5p orbitals penetrate the 4f subshell and are not shielded from