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# Reversible capping/uncapping of phosphorous-centered Keggin-type polyoxoniobate clusters†

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**Caps in  $\alpha$ -Keggin-type polyoxometalates [PM<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>9-</sup> (M: Nb=O or V=O) can be removed in basic condition to produce uncapped [PNb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>15-</sup>. Transmetalation or capping occurs from the reaction of [PNb<sub>14</sub>O<sub>42</sub>]<sup>9-</sup> or [PNb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>15-</sup> with either Sb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> or V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> to form [PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>9-</sup> or [PV<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>42</sub>]<sup>9-</sup>, respectively.**

One interesting mode of heterometal addition to the Keggin-type polyoxometalate clusters is capping, whereby a capping metal reduces the overall charge of the cluster. Several heterometals, such as V<sup>IV,V</sup>,<sup>1</sup> Ni<sup>III</sup>,<sup>2</sup> Cu<sup>II</sup>,<sup>3</sup> Zn<sup>II</sup>,<sup>4</sup> Sb<sup>III</sup>,<sup>5</sup> and La<sup>III</sup>,<sup>6</sup> are known as caps; among these V<sup>IV,V</sup> caps are the most common. The number of capping site can vary from 1 to 6. The capped Mo-, V- or W-based Keggin-type clusters have proven to be useful for spintronics<sup>7</sup> and as supramolecular materials for catalytic applications.<sup>4,8</sup> For the polyoxoniobates, vanadyl-capped Keggin-type polyoxoniobate ions have been synthesized recently, including [PV<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>42</sub>]<sup>9-</sup> ion (PV<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>).<sup>9</sup> Here we expand the library of capped Keggin polyoxoniobates as TMA (tetramethylammonium) salts; Sb<sup>III</sup>- or Nb<sup>V</sup>=O-bicapped  $\alpha$ -Keggin polyoxoniobates TMA<sub>9</sub>[PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]·28H<sub>2</sub>O (PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>) and TMA<sub>9</sub>[PNb<sub>14</sub>O<sub>42</sub>]·26H<sub>2</sub>O (PNb<sub>14</sub>). We also isolated novel TMA<sub>10</sub>H<sub>5</sub>[PNb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]·30.5H<sub>2</sub>O (PNb<sub>12</sub>) *via* an uncapping reaction starting from PNB<sub>14</sub> in highly basic condition. The synthesis of discrete PNB<sub>14</sub> clusters is important because Nb<sup>V</sup>-bicapped Keggin niobates have only been characterized as chain structures formed by Nb-( $\mu_2$ -O)<sub>2</sub>-Nb bridges.<sup>10</sup>

Here we show that capping/uncapping reaction can be reversed for vanadyl capping group. Although many kinds of

capped-Keggin clusters are known, reversibility is not commonly shown, nor well understood. We believe that reaction studies at the capping site in the Keggin ion can be particularly useful for polymerization studies that exploit reactions at the caps. We note that a controlled capping reaction of [PMO<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>3-</sup> by using electrochemical reduction to produce Co<sup>II</sup>, V<sup>IV</sup>, and Sb<sup>III</sup>-capped Keggin ion has been reported previously.<sup>11</sup>

The PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> cluster (Fig. 1) was synthesized by hydrothermal reaction of the mixture of stoichiometric amounts of hydrous niobium oxide, Sb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, TMAOH and phosphoric acid. In the crystal structure, two distinct PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> clusters are present in the crystallographic lattice; one of them has a pseudo-Keggin structure, which features central PO<sub>8</sub> with half-occupied oxygen atoms due to rotational disorder. Nearly nine TMA counteranions are found per cluster, so the cluster formula is [PSb<sup>III</sup><sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>9-</sup>. Bond-valence-sum (BVS) values for three antimony sites are 3.14, 3.07 and 3.26, which agree with the oxidation state of Sb<sup>III</sup>. Electrospray-ionization mass spectrometry (ESI-MS) of the compound provided spectra consistent with the stoichiometry, and

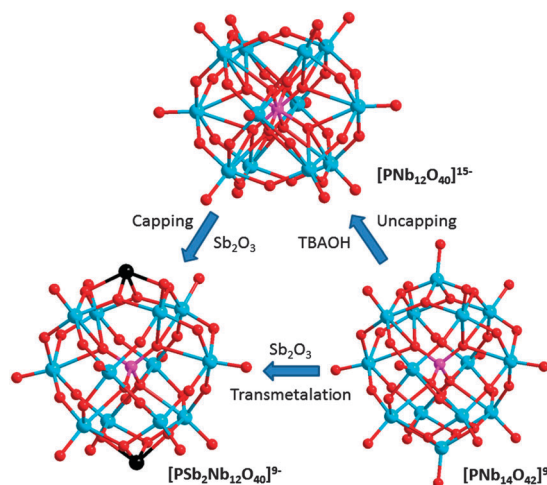


Fig. 1 Ball-and-stick models (pink: P, red: O, light blue: Nb, black: Sb) of PNB<sub>12</sub> (top), PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> (bottom left) and PNB<sub>14</sub> (bottom right) clusters.

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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental details, crystallographic table, TGA, FT-IR, ESI-MS spectra and pH dependent ESI-MS spectra of the compounds, ESI-MS while monitoring the reactions. CCDC 1014963–1014965. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c4cc05689b



the peaks are finely split due to the natural isotopes of antimony (Fig. S1, ESI†).

A different Keggin-type cluster formed when the hydrothermal reaction was carried out without  $\text{Sb}_2\text{O}_3$ . The product was generally waxy and we crystallized it in a hot concentrated ethanol solution. The crystal structure shows the cluster of  $[\text{PNb}_{14}\text{O}_{42}]^{9-}$ , with two bicapping *trans*  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  (Fig. 1). Seven TMA ions were found in the crystal structure, but elemental analysis and TGA data (Fig. S2, ESI†) of the compound better agrees with nine TMA, as was the case in  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  and  $\text{PV}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$ . We thus conclude that two TMA are disordered in the solvent region and thus could not be found during the structure refinement. In the ESI-MS spectra, the products always showed small peaks with lower  $m/z$  number and we tentatively assign this impurity as the mono-capped  $[\text{PNb}_{13}\text{O}_{41}]^{12-}$  ( $\text{PNb}_{13}$ ) (Fig. S1, ESI†). A  $\text{Ge}^{\text{IV}}$ -centered  $[\text{GeNb}_{13}\text{O}_{41}]^{13-}$  as  $\text{Cs}^+$  or  $\text{Rb}^+$  salt was structurally characterized recently, and this also supports our assignment of the small impurity peaks as the  $\text{PNb}_{13}$ .<sup>12</sup>

In the structure of  $\text{PNb}_{14}$ , capping  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  are slightly tilted from the pseudo- $C_4$  rotational axis of the Keggin ion (angles of  $\text{P1-Nb13-O41} = 173.04^\circ$  and  $\text{P1-Nb14-O42} = 170.24^\circ$ ) (Fig. 1 and Fig. S3, ESI†). Thermal ellipsoids of the capping  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  oxygen atoms are horizontally elongated compared to other terminal oxygen atoms, and the  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  bond lengths (1.726(13) and 1.735(12) Å) at the capping sites are slightly shorter than other  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  bonds (1.741(9) to 1.774(9) Å). These might be due to the rare pentacoordinate  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}$  environment in the capping site,<sup>13</sup> and explain the reactivity of  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  capping site as described below.

We found that bicapping  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}=\text{O}$  units in  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  can be uncapped under strongly basic conditions. When  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  was mixed with TBAOH solution in an open vial and kept at  $85^\circ\text{C}$  in a dry oven overnight, crystalline materials of  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  formed at the bottom of the vial. ESI-MS peaks of the newly formed  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  appear in lower  $m/z$  region relative to spectra for the  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  and match well with the composition of  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  identified in the crystal structure (Fig. S1, ESI†). We see an additional peak at  $m/z = 426.6$  and tentatively assign it to a lacunary  $\text{H}_{14}[\text{PNb}_{11}\text{O}_{39}](\text{H}_2\text{O})^{4-}$  ion, which could have formed by fragmentation in ESI-MS.

The  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  cluster in the crystal structure exhibits a pseudo-Keggin structure, similar to one of the clusters in  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  structure (Fig. 1). The  $\text{O}\cdots\text{O}$  distances between the square-like window for capping (2.65–2.70 Å) in  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  are less contracted than those in the  $\text{Sb}^{\text{III}}$ -capped window of same pseudo-Keggin unit in  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  (2.50–2.51 Å), due to the absence of capping metal. Generally, the  $\text{O}\cdots\text{O}$  distances in the capping site are in the order of  $\text{PNb}_{12} > \text{PNb}_{14} > \text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12} > \text{PV}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  (Fig. S4 and S5, ESI†). Although  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  should possess a  $-15$  charge, only 10 TMA ions are found in the crystal structure, and this number agrees with elemental analyses and TGA data (Fig. S2, ESI†). We propose that five protons are disordered on the  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  cluster surface, but we are unable to assign the protonation sites by BVS values (1.57 to 1.86) of the surface  $\mu_2$ -oxygens. We note that uncapped  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  Keggin structure has not been reported as a soluble form so far.

The  $^{31}\text{P}$  MAS-NMR data of the synthesized Keggin compounds are shown in Fig. 2. The chemical shifts of each Keggin

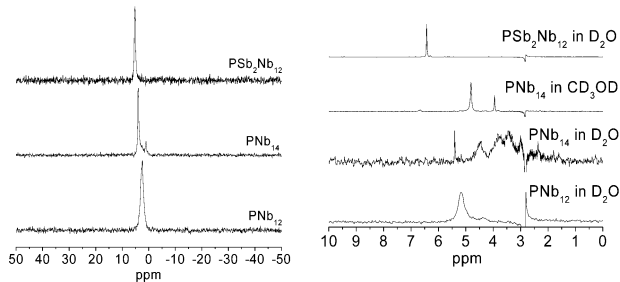


Fig. 2  $^{31}\text{P}$  MAS NMR (left) and  $^{31}\text{P}$  solution NMR (right) spectra. The apparent peaks at 2.8 ppm (right) are instrumental artifacts.

structure are slightly different, with 5.2, 4.0 and 2.4 ppm for  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$ ,  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  and  $\text{PNb}_{12}$ , respectively. The downfield  $^{31}\text{P}$  peak shift of  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  and  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  compared to  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  can be attributed to the existence of capping atoms ( $\text{Sb}^{\text{III}}$  or  $\text{Nb}^{\text{V}}$ ), and more downfield shift in  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  is attributed to higher electronegativity of antimony compared to niobium. The spectra of  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  features additional small peak at 1.04 ppm. We propose that the small peak arises from  $\text{PNb}_{13}$ , as indicated by ESI-MS (Fig. S1, ESI†). The  $^{31}\text{P}$ -NMR peak of  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  is broader than the peaks of bicapped Keggin compounds, due to less symmetric P–O bonds at the center of the structure. The P–O bonds in  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  range 1.500(10)–1.628(11) Å, while the P–O bonds in  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  and  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  have more regular P–O bonds (1.529(7)–1.594(7) Å and 1.544(9)–1.559(8) Å, respectively).

Stability of the clusters in solution was checked by using  $^{31}\text{P}$  NMR (Fig. 2). When the compounds were dissolved in  $\text{D}_2\text{O}$ ,  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$ ,  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  and  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  showed peaks at 6.4, 5.4 and 5.2 ppm, respectively, and the peak from  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  was broad, similarly to MAS NMR. The  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  showed large amount of unassignable broad peaks upfield, suggesting polymerization of  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  in water. In methanol,  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  shows two peaks at 4.8 and 3.9 ppm with integral ratio 1 : 0.3, which might correspond to  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  and  $\text{PNb}_{13}$ . The sharp peaks in methanol suggest that the series of broad peaks of  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  in  $\text{D}_2\text{O}$  are due to polymerization of the molecules in water. FT-IR spectra (Fig. S6, ESI†) of the three compounds are all similar to that of previously reported  $\text{PV}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$ , featuring P–O band around  $1025\text{ cm}^{-1}$ , Nb=O band around  $880\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and some Nb–O–Nb bands between  $850\text{--}600\text{ cm}^{-1}$ .<sup>14</sup> We note that the FT-IR spectrum of  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  generally shows broader bands than other compounds, possibly due to its less compact structure from the absence of capping ions.

The stabilities of these clusters were monitored by ESI-MS as a function of pH (Fig. S7 to S9, ESI†).  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  was seen to be stable between  $4 < \text{pH} < 12$ , similar to the stability range of  $\text{PV}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$ . The  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  was stable in the higher pH region ( $6 < \text{pH} < 12$ ), which is consistent with its formation condition at high pH and its high molecular charge. A solution of  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  formed precipitate when pH was reduced to below  $\text{pH} = 6$ , consistent with charge neutralization. In contrast, The  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  cluster exhibited a narrower pH stability range ( $8 < \text{pH} < 12$ ), and the cluster was unstable when titrated with acid.

Both  $\text{PNb}_{14}$  and  $\text{PNb}_{12}$  can directly react with  $\text{Sb}_2\text{O}_3$  or  $\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$  to form  $\text{PSb}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  or  $\text{PV}_2\text{Nb}_{12}$  by simple solution reaction at



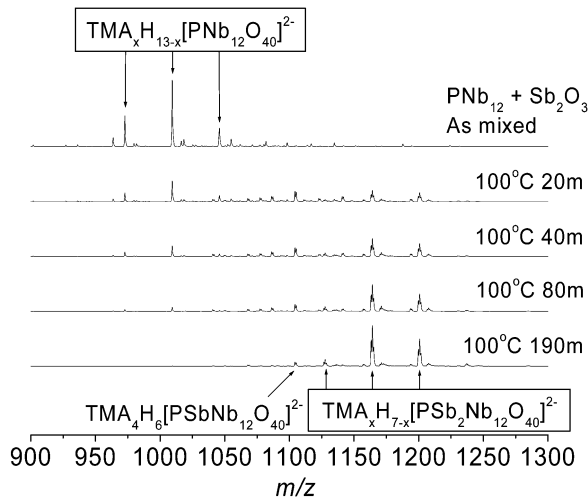


Fig. 3 ESI-MS monitored during the reaction of 50 mg of PNB<sub>12</sub> and 5 mg of Sb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> in 2 mL of water.

high yields. By using ESI-MS, we monitored the reaction in a capped vial at 100 °C and 70 °C for antimony and vanadium capping, respectively (Fig. S10 and S11, ESI<sup>†</sup>). The complete formation of PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> was slower (~2 h) than PV<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> (<1 h). When starting from PNB<sub>14</sub>, the formation of hetero-capped Keggin ions such as [PSbNb<sub>13</sub>O<sub>41</sub>]<sup>9-</sup> or [PVNb<sub>13</sub>O<sub>42</sub>]<sup>9-</sup> as intermediates was detected by using ESI-MS. The capping reaction of PNB<sub>12</sub> was also monitored similarly, and the reaction proceeds with intermediates such as mono-capped [PVNb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>41</sub>]<sup>12-</sup> or [PSbNb<sub>12</sub>O<sub>40</sub>]<sup>12-</sup> (Fig. 3 and Fig. S11, ESI<sup>†</sup>). Thus the reaction apparently occurs *via* stepwise substitution from PNB<sub>14</sub>, or addition of capping sites to PNB<sub>12</sub>, respectively. These reactions can be completed even at room temperature after stirring the mixture for a few days. Because the conversion of PNB<sub>14</sub> to PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> or PV<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> apparently involves direct substitution of the capping unit from Nb<sup>V</sup>=O to Sb<sup>III</sup> or V<sup>V</sup>=O, this reaction can be regarded as transmetalation. Transmetalation is a well-known synthetic strategy in organometallic chemistry, but rare in polyoxometalates to our knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Similarly to the uncapping reaction of PNB<sub>14</sub> to form PNB<sub>12</sub>, PV<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> can also be uncapped to form PNB<sub>12</sub> in a same condition, thus uncapping/capping reaction of V<sup>V</sup>=O is reversible (see experimental section in ESI<sup>†</sup>). The PSb<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>12</sub> could not be uncapped even with larger amount of base added during attempted reaction.

We demonstrate that P-centered Keggin polyoxoniobate can be capped or uncapped at certain reaction conditions, and the reaction depends on the stability of the capped niobate. Such a capping or transmetalation reaction, starting from PNB<sub>12</sub> or PNB<sub>14</sub>, is an attractive route for selective capping by various types of transition metals and allows unprecedented control. This control over capping/uncapping can be particularly useful for polymerizing Keggin ions by exploiting the heterogeneity of opposed apical bicaps. The newly isolated and discrete PNB<sub>14</sub> ion can be used as a precursor for rational synthesis of oligomeric chains of Keggin ions in materials science.

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