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ARTICLE TYPE

Two Rh^{III}-substituted polyoxoniobates and their base-induced transformation: $[H_2RhNb_9O_{28}]^{6-}$ and $[Rh_2(OH)_4Nb_{10}O_{30}]^{8-}$

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Two new rhodium-substituted polyoxoniobates, [H₂RhNb₉O₂₈]⁶⁻ (RhNb₉) and [Rh₂(OH)₄Nb₁₀O₃₀]⁸⁻ (Rh₂Nb₁₀) are reported. The two distinct Rh^{III}-substituted niobate clusters behave differently when the pH is raised with 10 TMAOH: the Rh₂Nb₁₀ is stable until pH~12.7, but RhNb₉ dissociates to form RhNb5 and RhNb10, similar to some of our other metal-substituted niobates, such as the MNb₉ ions (M=Cr or Mn), which transform to MNb₁₀ when the solution pH is raised.

- 15 Transition-metal (TM) substituted polyoxometalates are an important class of materials. The TM-substitution can add catalytic function to the cluster and the polyoxometalate framework adds great redox properties, especially for polyoxomolybdates and -tungstates.¹ In the polyoxoniobate system, a
- 20 series of TM-substituted decaniobate-type [MNb₉O₂₈]^{x-} (MNb₉, M=Cr-Ni) have been synthesized recently² and add to the Ti-, Vand Cu-substituted polyoxoniobates that were previously known.³ In these studies, the substitution is limited to the early transition metals. For the heavier transition metals, there have been
- 25 structures reported for Re(CO)3-, CpRh- or Pt-coordinated (capped) hexaniobates (Nb₆).⁴ However, substitution of 2nd- or 3rd-row transition metals in the polyoxoniobates as atoms internal to the structure, rather than as capping atoms, has not yet been reported to our knowledge, although among the group V ³⁰ polyoxometalates, $[H_2Pt^{IV}V_9O_{28}]^{5-}$ is known in the
- polyoxovanadate system.5

Here we report the synthesis, structure, characterization and photocatalytic H₂ evolution study of two Rh^{III}-substituted The two compounds reported here have the niobates. 35 stoichiometry: $[H_2RhNb_9O_{28}]^{6-}$ (RhNb₉) and $[Rh_2(OH)_4Nb_{10}O_{30}]^{8-}$

(Rh₂Nb₁₀) as tetramethylammonium (TMA) salts. The structures of these clusters resemble those of two Cr^{III}-substituted niobates, $[H_2CrNb_9O_{28}]^{6-}$ (CrNb₉) and $[Cr_2(OH)_4Nb_{12}O_{30}]^{8-}$ (Cr₂Nb₁₀) that we previously described.^{2, 6}

- ⁴⁰ Substitution of Rh^{III} in the polyoxoniobate structure was challenging. Our previous methods employed for MNb₉ (M=Cr-Ni) generally showed low yield for rhodium substitution (less than 1 %).² The low yield might be a result from the notoriously slow reaction rate of ligand substitutions at the Rh^{III} center.⁷
- 45 When we attempted to circumvent the slow kinetics with temperature, we found that some Rh^{III} was reduced to Rh⁰ as a gray or black powder mixed with the crude product at the

hydrothermal reaction conditions when the temperature was higher than 120°C. In order to solve this problem, we added 50 hydrogen peroxide in the reaction mixture to prevent reduction of Rh^{III}. Correspondingly the yields were improved when H₂O₂ was added (40 % and 7 % for Rh₂Nb₁₀ and RhNb₉, respectively). Hydrogen peroxide also might have helped to dissociate the rather stable Nb6 or Nb10 ions and facilitate the formation of 55 Rh^{III}-substituted structures.8



Fig. 1 Ball-and-stick model of RhNb₉ (left) and Rh₂Nb₁₀ (right) (Nb:gray, Rh:gold, O:red). Intramolecular hydrogen bonds are shown with dashed line in Rh₂Nb₁₀

60 The solution after hydrothermal reaction was typically a mixture of Nb₁₀, Nb₆, RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ ions, as found by electrosprayionization mass spectra (ESI-MS). We took advantage of the slightly different solubility of each compound to facilitate separation and purification of the Rh-substituted molecules. After 65 washing with isopropanol, the product was extracted with ethanol. The ethanol extract was a mixture of Rh₂Nb₁₀ and Nb₆ ions, and the precipitate that remained after ethanol extraction was a mixture of Nb₁₀ and RhNb₉. The RhNb₉ was separated from Nb₁₀ by extraction with ethanol/methanol mixture. Mild 70 heating of the ethanol extract for a few hours caused condensation of more soluble Nb6 into less soluble Nb10 precipitate. The ethanolic orange solution that remained after this heating step consisted of mostly Rh₂Nb₁₀. The crystalline products of Rh₂Nb₁₀ and RhNb₉ were obtained after solvent 75 evaporation.

In the crystal structure of RhNb₉, Rh^{III} is substituted at the central metal site so that it does not possess a terminal oxo group, as we also observed in the MNb₉O₂₈ (M=Cr-Ni) series.²² above The Rh^{III} metal is disordered among the two central sites due to the centrosymmetry, and the sum of Rh^{III} occupancy in those two sites is 1.12, which agrees with stoichiometry of RhNb₉. Bond valence sum (BVS) calculation of the Rh site is (3.03), indicating the oxidation state of Rh^{III}. The BVS values of two Rh- μ_2 -O-Nb ⁵ (1.37 and 1.38) are much lower than other bridging oxygen atoms, which suggest that those are protonated, similarly to the substituted MNb₉ (M=Cr-Ni).² The structure of Rh₂Nb₁₀ is similar to Cr₂Nb₁₀, and it can be described as two RhNb₅

- Lindqvist-type clusters fused by two μ_4 -O atoms linking two Rh^{III} and two μ_3 -O atoms linking Rh^{III} and Nb^V. The oxidation state of rhodium in Rh₂Nb₁₀ is also Rh^{III}, as determined by BVS calculation (2.95). The Rh-O bond lengths in Rh₂Nb₁₀ are longer and more regular (2.0245(16)-2.0605(16) Å) than Cr-O bonds in Cr₂Nb₁₀ (1.9428(13)-2.0131(12) Å). In the structure of Rh₂Nb₁₀, 15 four protons are found on the four Rh- μ_2 -O-Nb, like in the
- structure of Cr_2Nb_{10} .⁶ Those protons form intramolecular hydrogen bonds to the neighbouring Nb=O (H…O distances of 2.309 and 2.386 Å). The ESI-MS spectra of the RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ agree with their assigned stoichiometries (Fig. S1).



Fig. 2 Change of ESI-MS spectra of RhNb₉ when the solution pH was adjusted to 12.9.

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The pH-dependent stability of the Rh^{III}-substituted niobate clusters were studied by using ESI-MS. When titrated with ²⁵ TMAOH, the golden yellow color of Rh₂Nb₁₀ solution did not change until highly basic conditions (pH~12.9, Fig. S2), and most of the Rh₂Nb₁₀ clusters remained intact for months at this strongly basic condition, as checked by ESI-MS (Fig. S3). When the solution of RhNb₉ was titrated with TMAOH to this ³⁰ condition, the solution color slowly changed from orange to faint yellow overnight (Fig. S2). The ESI-MS spectra of the solution after one day (Fig. 2) indicated dissociation of RhNb₉ to RhNb₅ and Nb₆. Also, formation of a new RhNb₁₀ was detectable via ESI-MS, which could have formed by self-assembly of ³⁵ dissociated fragments (Fig. 2). It is most likely that this RhNb₁₀ would have a similar structure of previously reported

- [H₂Mn^{IV}Nb₁₀O₃₂]⁸⁻ (MnNb₁₀), in view of their similar ESI-MS pattern.⁹ This observation spurred us to further investigate other TM-substituted polyoxoniobate clusters. We added 50 mg of ⁴⁰ TMAOH·5H₂O to each aqueous solution containing 30 mg of
- MNb_9 (M=Ti, Cr-Ni) and Cr_2Nb_{10} clusters to make pH~12.6 and

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monitored the solution by using ESI-MS (Fig. S4-S10). The Cr₂Nb₁₀ clusters were stable at this pH for a long period of time, like Rh₂Nb₁₀ (Fig. S4). The TiNb₉, CrNb₉ and MnNb₉ clusters 45 changed in a few days at this high-pH condition. Some Ti₂Nb₈ clusters^{3a,c,d} formed after a week when the pH of TiNb₉ was increased (Fig. S5). Considerable amount of CrNb₁₀ formed after a few days from the CrNb₉ solution at high pH (Fig. S6). This result shows that CrIII- and RhIII-substituted polyoxoniobates are 50 not only structurally similar, but also transform via similar pathways at high pH. The color of MnNb₉ solution changed from purple to brown with time, suggesting oxidation of Mn^{III}, and ESI-MS spectra after 19 days showed formation of small amount of Mn^{IV}Nb₁₀ (Fig. S7). However, species such as MnNb₅ or 55 CrNb₅ was not detectable, which suggests that they are unstable. Other MNb₉ clusters (M=Fe-Ni) were relatively stable at the high pH, but small amount of Nb₆ as a decomposition product was detected (Fig. S8-S10). Thus M_2Nb_{10} (M=Rh^{III} or Cr^{III}) seems to be more stable than MNb₉ at high pH. This higher stability of 60 M₂Nb₁₀ is partly attributable to the existence of intramolecular

- hydrogen bonds, which hold the structure together, perhaps making it less susceptible to base hydrolysis.When titrated with acid, Rh₂Nb₁₀ was evident in the ESI-MS
- spectra until pH 4.0, and RhNb₉ was stable until pH 4.5, although ⁶⁵ we recognize that the kinetics of dissociation may be suppressed by inclusion of the Rh^{III}. Both solutions formed hydrous niobiumoxide precipitate below those pH values, which could form without dissociating the structures. On the other hand, we note that the stability window of Rh₂Nb₁₀ (4<pH<13) is similar to ⁷⁰ Cr₂Nb₁₀.⁶ The RhNb₉ exhibited a wider stability range (4.5<pH<12) than other MNb₉ clusters (M=Cr-Ni) in general.



Scheme 1 Base-induced transformation of MNb9 and M2Nb10 (M=Rh, Cr)

The UV-Vis spectra of RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ are shown in Fig 3. ⁷⁵ The Rh₂Nb₁₀ shows about twice the absorption of visible light relative to the RhNb₉ ion, as expected from the stoichiometry of the clusters. The absorption band of Rh₂Nb₁₀ (440 nm) is more blue shifted compared to that of RhNb₉ (475 nm), which is responsible for the slightly different colors of the solutions of Rh₂Nb₁₀ (golden yellow) and RhNb₉ (orange-red). These absorption bands correspond to ¹A_{1g} to ¹T_{1g} or ¹T_{2g} transition of 5 Rh^{III}.¹⁰ The RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ clusters were also characterized by using FT-IR (Fig. S11). The FT-IR spectrum of Rh₂Nb₁₀ show similar feature to that of Cr₂Nb₁₀ and that of RhNb₉ is similar to those of MNb₉, which reflect their structural similarity.



 $_{10}$ $\,$ Fig. 3 UV-Vis spectra of 2 mM solution of Rh_2Nb_{10} and $RhNb_9$ without background electrolyte



Fig. 4 Comparison of H₂-evolution activity from the methanol/water solutions (20% v/v) of RhNb₉, Rh₂Nb₁₀ and Nb₁₀, with and without H_2PtCl_6

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TM-substituted polyoxometalates, including polyoxoniobates, have recently been actively studied for use in the water-splitting reaction to generate H₂ and/or O₂ for energy applications.¹¹ We studied H₂ evolution from RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ ions as a ²⁰ continuation of our previous H₂-evolution study of the MNb₉ ions (M=Cr-Ni). When irradiated with visible light, similarly to the MNb₉ ions, neither RhNb₉ nor Rh₂Nb₁₀ solutions (20% v/v methanol/water) evolved H₂. Methanol was used as a sacrificial oxidant. The solution did not evolve H₂ without methanol. When ²⁵ a full spectrum from Xe lamp (without UV filter) was employed, however, H₂ evolution was observed (50 µmolg⁻¹ h⁻¹ and 43 µmolg⁻¹ h⁻¹, for RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀, Fig. 4). After irradiation, the originally orange-red or yellow solution of RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀

- ³⁰ probably indicate partial reduction of Rh^{III} to Rh⁰. We have found such colloids in our previous work and are not suprised by them.² The Rh^{II} is known to exhibit a green color.¹⁰ We do not know the amount of Rh^{III} that has been reduced, but comparison of the peak intensities in ESI-MS spectra of the solution before and after ³⁵ irradiation indicated that most of the clusters remained intact (Fig S12 and S13). The UV-Vis spectra of Rh₂Nb₁₀ before and after
- the irradiation also did not change considerably, but absorption of RhNb₉ solution increased after irradiation, undoubtedly due to the presence of the colloids mentioned above (Fig S14 and S15). In
- ⁴⁰ the previous H₂ evolution study of the MNb₉ ions (M=Cr-Ni),² we found that a significant amount of MNb₉ decomposed into Nb₆ and Nb₁₀, with corresponding changes in the UV-Vis spectrum due to the colloid formation. Among them, formation of colloids from NiNb₉ and CoNb₉ positively affected H₂ evolution,
- ⁴⁵ while colloid formation from other MNb₉ (M=Cr-Fe) did not increase the amount of H₂ evolution. In our previous work we have found that the colloids were mixed TM-niobium oxide and they were amorphous, as determined by XRD, TEM and EDX. The relative lack of Nb₆ and Nb₁₀ decomposition products s after
- ⁵⁰ irradiation in the present RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ suggests that these rhodium RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ clusters are more stable, perhaps only kinetically so, under the irradiation of intense light when compared to MNb₉ (M=Cr-Ni). We also compared H₂-evolution activity of the clusters when H₂PtCl₆ was added as a cocatalyst.
- ⁵⁵ In the existence of Pt, Nb₁₀ solution showed ~20 fold increase in the H₂ evolution (1385 μ molg⁻¹ h⁻¹) and amount of precipitate was negligible, but H₂ evolution from RhNb₉ and Rh₂Nb₁₀ after adding H₂PtCl₆ showed only about 3 fold increases (167 and 152 μ molg⁻¹ h⁻¹, respectively) and conspicuous gray-black precipitate
- ⁶⁰ formed in the solution (Fig. 4). This presumed Pt-Rh-NbOx precipitate must be responsible for the slight increase of the H₂ evolution, but we did not attempt to characterize it further. The different precipitation behavior of Nb₁₀ and RhNb₉/Rh₂Nb₁₀ after photocatalytic reaction might be due to their different stabilities ⁶⁵ upon addition of acidic H₂PtCl₆. And the lower H₂ evolution
- activity of $RhNb_9/Rh_2Nb_{10}$ compared to Nb_{10} is likely due to the reduced amount of dissolved clusters in solution caused by precipitation, as seen in ESI-MS (Fig S12 and S13).

Conclusions

- ⁷⁰ Two types of new rhodium-substituted polyoxoniobates were synthesized and isolated. The evidences of base-promoted transformation of RhNb₉ to RhNb₅ and RhNb₁₀ suggest a new synthetic strategy for new polyoxoniobates. Such a reaction can be a useful post-synthetic pathway for new polyoxoniobates,
 ⁷⁵ instead of commonly employed hydrothermal reaction in the polyoxoniobate chemistry. The transformation of MnNb₉ and CrNb₉ at high pH shows that the stabilities of each TM-substituted decaniobate are different, even if they form similar dissociation products at high pH. The Rh^{III}-substituted
 ⁸⁰ polyoxoniobates, such as RhNb₅ which might have terminal Rh-OH groups.
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turned greenish brown with small amount of colloids, which

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Notes and references

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- † Electronic Supplementary Information (ESI) available: Experimental ¹⁰ detalis, ESI-MS, FT-IR, UV-Vis data. See DOI: 10.1039/b000000x/
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