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A large spin-crossover $[\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]^{8+}$ tetrahedral cage†‡

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Polynuclear Fe(II) coordination cages have received considerable attention and have been demonstrated to display hysteresis and have been demonstrated to display high-spin (HS) and low-spin (LS) behaviour. The successful construction of larger supramolecular Fe(II) cages, especially those containing spin-crossover Fe(II) centres, still remains a challenge. Clearly the design of the organic ligand is a key element for achieving such SCO molecular cage systems.

In the present study, building on design principles demonstrated to be successful by Kruger, Nitschke, and Gu, imidazole-imine sites were included in the organic ligand component since these groups show weaker ligand strength than the 2,2'-bipyridyl and pyridyl-imine sites commonly employed in tetrahedral cage syntheses. In addition, imidazole-imine groups have been well documented to be ‘classical’ coordination units for inducing SCO behaviour in Fe(II) complex systems, including the limited number of Fe(II) SCO tetrahedral cages already reported. Here we report the synthesis of a new face-capped tetranuclear iron(II) cage $[\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4](\text{BF}_4)_8$ employing a large fully conjugated rigid tribranched framework ligand $\text{L}$ in Figure 1 aimed at inducing Fe(II) spin-crossover behaviour at each of its equivalent metal centres.

![Schematic representation of rigid ligand L](image)

**Results and discussion**

The reaction of 1-Methyl-2-imidazolocarboxaldehyde and 1,3,5-tris(4-aminophenyl)benzene in methanol produced the desired $\text{C}_3$-symmetric tris-bidentate ligand $\text{L}$ in 75 % yield. $^1$H and $^13$C NMR spectra (Figures S1 and S2) and high resolution electrospray ionization (HR-ESI) mass spectrometry results were consistent with the proposed structure of $\text{L}$. In the HR-mass spectrum, the major peak is observed m/z 628.2943 [L+H]$^+$ (Figure S3) and the appropriate isotope pattern for [L+H]$^+$ was observed (Figure S4).

The further reaction of $\text{L}$ with iron(II) tetrafluoroborate in acetonitrile followed by the slow diffusion of diethyl ether into the reaction mixture produced prismatic crystals of...
[Fe₄L₄][BF₄]₈•16MeCN suitable for X-ray diffraction studies (Figure 2). The four homochiral facially coordinated octahedral metal centres are bridged by four of the ligands such that the ligands cover each face of a tetrahedron, and each tetrahedron has overall $T$-symmetry with $C_3$-axes of symmetry passing through each metal centre and the centre of each ligand. There are three independent complexes in the asymmetric unit and the iron(II) centres within each tetrahedron are separated by between 14.5 and 15.1 Å placing this amongst the largest spin-crossover cages yet synthesised. For comparison, the two other spin-crossover cages reported have iron-iron separations of 11.85 Å$^{10}$ and 14.16 Å$^{11}$. Unlike many related complexes, this coordination cage crystallises in a chiral space group (P3) such that the cage molecules spontaneously resolve within each crystal. In the crystal examined all the metal centres displayed Δ-stereochemistry. The cage encapsulates a volume of 183 Å$^3$ and no significant residual electron density was located within the central cavity. The iron-nitrogen bond lengths are between 1.961(11) and 2.288(10) Å consistent with the magnetic results which suggest an intermediate spin at 100 K. Attempts to collect a crystal structure of the cage in its high-spin state (300 K) failed due to solvent loss from the crystals. In addition, scanning electron microscopy (SEM) photographs confirmed the nanocage uniformly crystallised in polyhedral shape (Figures 3a, b and c) and the crystals underwent rapid decay due to the loss of solvents (Figures 3b and c).

The UV-Vis spectrum of the coordination cage 1 in solid state over the region 2000–350 nm (Figure 4) reveals a relative low broad absorption band at 530 nm and an intense band at 410 nm. The former is attributed to a metal-to-ligand (MLCT) ($d$–$\pi^*$) transition characteristic of an Fe(II) centre coordinated to a imidazole-imine based large aromatic ligand.$^{8,11}$ The intense band at 410 nm is likely to arise from $\pi$–$\pi^*$ transitions.$^{8,11}$

FT-IR spectra and Raman spectra of L and 1 were recorded at room temperature (Figures S13-14 and S15-16). Both the ligand L and coordination cage 1 show absorptions in the region 1600-1500 cm$^{-1}$, these signals are typical of stretching imidazole-imine (C=N) groups. In the FT-IR spectrum of cage 1 (Figure S14), it shows the existence of BF$_4^-$ at 1047 cm$^{-1}$. Raman spectra between L (Figure S15) and 1 (Figure S16) are very similar and also confirmed the presence of C=N groups.
Magnetic measurements

Magnetic susceptibility measurements reveal a gradual incomplete spin transition over the range 5 – 300 K (Figure 5). The spin-crossover phenomenon between the high-spin and low-spin states for solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) and non-solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) was followed by measurements of the molar magnetic susceptibility \(\chi_m\) as a function of temperature (Figures 5a and b).

![Graph showing \(\chi_mT\) versus \(T\) for solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) and non-solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\).](image)

Figure 5: \(\chi_mT\) versus \(T\) plots for (a) solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) and (b) non-solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\). The inset shows the relatively low intensity transition in region 450-680 nm.

![Graph showing \(\chi_mT\) versus \(T\) for \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) and \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) compounds.](image)

The \(\chi_mT\) value for \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) is equal to 11.44 cm\(^3\) K mol\(^{-1}\) at 300 K and 7.85 cm\(^3\) K mol\(^{-1}\) at 50 K consistent with a gradual spin-crossover transition (Figure 5a). After annealing at 400 K, non-solvated \([\text{Fe}_4\text{L}_4]\) was obtained. The \(\chi_mT\) value of the desolvated material is equal to 11.60 cm\(^3\) K mol\(^{-1}\) at 400 K, suggesting iron(II) is in the high-spin state. On cooling, the \(\chi_mT\) values gradually decreases (Figure 5 b). The \(\chi_mT\) value at 50 K is equal to 8.29 cm\(^3\) K mol\(^{-1}\), which shows that spin-crossover from the high-spin to the low-spin states is induced in about 30 % of the iron(II) ions. In addition, the Mössbauer spectra measured at 5 K support the existence of iron(II) both in the high-spin and low-spin states (Figure 6). The \(\chi_mT\) values are also in agreement with the area ratios of Mössbauer absorption intensity of the high-spin and low-spin species.

![Mössbauer spectrum of non-solvated cage 1 at 5 K.](image)

Figure 6: Mössbauer spectrum of non-solvated cage 1 at 5 K. The iron(II) high-spin is shown in blue, and low-spin in red.

The Mössbauer spectrum measured at 5 K reveals a two quadrupole-split doublets. The first doublet is wide (quadrupole-splitting Q.S. = 2.18 mm s\(^{-1}\) and isomer shift I.S. = 1.26 mm s\(^{-1}\)) and the second narrow (Q.S. = 0.94 mm s\(^{-1}\) and I.S. = 0.21 mm s\(^{-1}\)), representing the high-spin and low-spin states (Figure 6), respectively. The \(\chi_mT\) values are also in agreement with the area ratios of Mössbauer absorption intensity of the high-spin and low-spin species (67 : 33). This, combined with the magnetic susceptibility studies suggests that the spin transition arises from only one of the four metal centres changing from high-spin to low-spin, while similar cage molecules showed a more complete transition, with three of the four centres switching spin states, potentially arising from changes in metal-metal distances and coordinating ligands.\(^{10,11}\)

A green semiconductor laser (\(\lambda = 532\) nm, 10 mW/cm\(^2\)) was used as a light source to investigate the effects of illumination. The passed light was guided via an optical fibre into the SQUID. The sample was placed on the edge of the optical fibre. When the annealed samples were illuminated at 5 K, an increase in the susceptibility by illumination was observed (Figure 5b). The change in the \(\chi_m\) value persisted for several hours, even after the illumination was halted. This suggests that the transition...
from the low-spin state to the high-spin state can be induced by illumination i.e Light-Induced Excited Spin-State Trapping (LIESST). The $\chi_m T$ value decreases with the increase in temperature and that the thermal relaxation to the ground state occurs. The LIESST effect in the non-solvated compound occurs with $T$ (LIESST) of 55 K.

Conclusions

In summary, we describe the efficient synthesis of a new discrete tetranuclear SCO Fe(II) cage incorporating rigid tris-bidentate ligands with suitable ligand strength arising from the imidazole-imine functional units. The structure has been unambiguously characterised by X-ray crystallography, ESI mass spectrometry, UV-vis-NIR, FT-IR and Raman spectroscopy. SCO behaviour of the coordination cage has been investigated. Further studies on these and related other Fe(II) coordination cages, including a high pressure solid state investigation, are ongoing and will be reported in due course.

Experimental

Materials and synthesis

All reagents and solvents were purchased from commercial sources.

Physical measurements.

$^1$H NMR and $^{13}$C NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker 300 MHz spectrometer. High resolution ESI-MS data were acquired using a Waters Xevo QToF mass spectrometer, operating in positive ion mode. FT-IR spectra were recorded on a Bruker Tensor 27 Fourier transform infrared spectrometer using diamond single bounce ATR sampling device. The UV-vis spectra were measured at ambient temperature using a Cary 5000 spectrophotometer equipped with a Labsphere Biconical Accessory.

SEM measurements. The SEM experiments were carried out using SEM JEOL JSM 6510LV with an attached silicon drift EDS detector and operated in low-vac with a chamber pressure of 30pa. Accelerating voltage was set to 25.0KV and a spot size of 60.

Raman measurements. Raman spectra were recorded using a Bruker Raman Scope in combination with Senterra dispersive Raman Microscope. The 532 nm line of a laser (0.2 mW for L and 2 mW for cage 1) was used as the excitation source.

Magnetic measurements. Susceptibility data were collected using a Quantum Design SQUID magnetometer calibrated against a standard palladium sample. The data were collected between 5 and 400 K and the scan rate of the temperature was fixed at 2.0 K min$^{-1}$.

Mössbauer experiments were carried out using a Wissel MVT-1000 Mössbauer spectrometer with a $^{57}$Co/Rh source in a constant-acceleration transmission spectrometer (Topologic Systems) equipped with a closed-cycle helium refrigerator cryostat (Iwatani Co., Ltd.). All isomer shifts are given relative to $\alpha$-Fe at room temperature. Measurements at low temperature were performed.

Ligand synthesis

1-Methyl-2-imidazolocarboxaldehyde (469 mg, 4.26 mmol) in methanol (20 mL) was added dropwise to a suspension of 1,3,5-tris(4-aminophenyl)-benzene (500 mg, 1.42 mmol) in methanol (50 mL). The mixture was heated at reflux for overnight leading to a clear yellow solution. The residue obtained after the removal of the solvent was recrystallised from an ethanol-acetonitrile mixture. The crystalline product was washed with acetonitrile (3x5 mL) to give L as a pale yellow powder (669 mg, 75%).

Complex synthesis

$^57$FeN$_4$L$_2$[BF$_4$]$\cdot$2H$_2$O: Fe[B$_3$F$_8$]$_4$·3H$_2$O (115 mg, 0.34 mmol) in acetonitrile (10 mL) was slowly added to a mixture of 1 (200 mg, 0.32 mmol) in acetonitrile (50 mL), there was a immediate colour change from yellow to dark red. The reaction mixture was heated on 70 °C with stirring for 4 h. Slow diffusion of diethyl ether into the mixture resulted in the formation of dark red polycrystal and air dry. Yield: 91%. Elemental analysis (%) calc'd for C$_{36}$H$_{32}$Fe$_{18}$N$_{18}$O$_{28}$: C 47.64, H 4.82, N 12.82; found: C 47.51, H 4.77, N 12.88. Single crystals were taken from the same sample and used directly in the X-ray study. FTIR (cm$^{-1}$): 3392(br), 1597m, 1475s, 873s, 833s, 752s, 688s, 541m; ESI-HRMS (positive-ion detection, CH$_3$OH/H$_2$O): $m/z$ = 628.2943

Crystallography

X-ray structural data were collected at beamline MX1 of the Australian Synchrotron employing silicon double crystal monochromated synchrotron radiation (0.7108Å) at 100(2) K. Data integration and reduction were undertaken with XDS$^{23}$ and subsequent computations were carried out using the WinGX-32 graphical user interface. The structure was solved by charge flipping using SUPERFLIP. Empirical absorption corrections were applied to the data set using the program SADABS$^{25}$ Data were refined and extended with SHELXL-2014. In general non-hydrogen atoms with occupancies greater than 0.5 were refined anisotropically. Carbon-bound hydrogen atoms were included in idealised positions and refined using a riding model. The crystals employed rapidly lost solvent after removal from the mother
liquor. Rapid (<10 seconds) handling at dry ice temperatures prior to quenching in the cryostream was required to collect data. Despite these measures, the use of a synchrotron source and multiple collection attempts, no reflections at better than 0.9 Å resolution were observed. In addition, data collection at the beamline was restricted to a 360° rotation around a single axis resulting in less than ideal redundancy. Reflecting the less than ideal diffraction, there is substantial disorder in a number of the anions which required the use of bond length and angle restraints to facilitate realistic modelling. Further reflecting the solvent loss and poor diffraction properties, there is a significant amount of void volume in the lattice containing smeared electron density from disordered solvent and anions. This area of density could not be successfully modelled and the SQUEEZE \textsuperscript{28} function of PLATON \textsuperscript{29} was employed resulting in significantly improved residuals. Despite these limitations the quality of the data is more than suitable for establishing the connectivity of the system. The Flack parameter refined to 0.05(3).\textsuperscript{30-33}

Formula C_{14}H_{18}O_{38}F_{23}Fe_{2}N_{32}M_{2}, M 4085.71, trigonal, space group P3\#143, a 31.590(5), b 31.590(5), c 18.320(4) Å, γ 120°, V 15833(6) Å\textsuperscript{3}, D\textsubscript{0h} 1.286 g cm\textsuperscript{-3}, Z 3, crystal size 0.05 by 0.05 by 0.05 mm, colour orange, habit prism, temperature 100(2) K, 0.05(3). \textsuperscript{30-33}

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Notes and references

\textsuperscript{‡} The themed issue on ‘Spin-State switches in Molecular Materials Chemistry’

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