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Unexpected Supramolecular Induced Redox Switching in Sandwich Gd Bisphthalocyaninate

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The redox state of the phthalocyanine in sandwich lanthanide complexes is crucial for their applications. In this work, we demonstrate that the cation-induced supramolecular assembly of crown-substituted phthalocyanine lanthanide complexes Ln[(15C5)₄Pc]₂ can be used to control the redox state of the ligand simultaneously with the coordination sphere of the central metal. We achieve unprecedented redox switching of phthalocyanine ligands in a double-decker Gd(III) complex, resulting from the intramolecular inclusion of potassium cations between the decks with simultaneous twisting of the ligands (the skew angle between them decreases from 44.61° to 0.21°). Such a structural change leads to an increase in the deck to deck distance and drastically facilitates ligand reduction. It was demonstated that this process is anion dependent. Thus, only potassium salts of weak acids (KOPiv, KOAc) induce intramolecular inclusion of cations with redox switching in contrast to salts of strong acids (KBr, KOPic, KSCN and KPF6), where such a redox process does not occur. This breakthrough opens new avenues for controlling the electrochromic properties of phthalocyanines, along with other properties, such as electrical conductivity, optics, etc.

Introduction

Phthalocyanines (Pcs) and their lanthanide complexes are π conjugated electron-rich molecules, widely studied for various applications¹⁻⁵. Phthalocyanines possess numerous aromatic π electrons, which determine their photo- and redox-activity⁶⁻⁹, electrochromic^{10,11} and semiconducting properties¹². These properties are further enhanced in sandwich lanthanide complexes due to intramolecular π - π interactions and the intrinsic nature of the centres^{13–18}. metal The electrochromic behaviour of bisphthalocyaninates is determined by the ligand-centred redox conversion of M(Pc)₂ between at least three forms of trivalent metal complexes¹⁹ – anionic $[M^{3+}(Pc^{2-})_2]^-$, neutral $[(Pc^{--})M^{3+}(Pc^{2-})]^0$ and cationic [M³⁺(Pc⁻)₂]⁺ ones. In addition to the spectacular blue-greenred colour changes displayed by these three forms, switching between redox states in sandwich Pcs is also crucial to tune their electron conductivity²⁰, magnetic properties^{21–23} or nonlinear optical response²⁴. The electron-conducting properties of double-decker lanthanide complexes are determined by the unpaired π -electron of the neutral form, making them important organic semiconductors

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first time reported in 1987¹². The interaction of double-deckers with oxidizing or reducing gases, such as NO₂ or NH₃, switches the redox state of ligands and drastically reduces the conductivity, which allows to use these complexes as semiconducting gas sensors^{25,26}. Sandwich phthalocyanines can also be employed to construct voltammetric sensors, known as electronic nose and tongue, to discriminate odours from a variety of foods, beverages or fumes^{27–29}.

The introduction of substituents responsible for supramolecular assembly opens up new opportunities to organize phthalocyanine molecules in a specific way^{3,30–36}. One of the brightest examples of such substituents are crown ethers^{37–44}, which enable the cationinduced assembly of sandwich lanthanide complexes, leading to control of their functional properties ^{45–55}. Alkali cations with an ionic radius larger than the crown ether cavity can connect two adjacent molecules forming dimers^{41,55–61} or longer oligomers^{62–65} (Fig. 1a, b). They can also integrate between decks of the same sandwich molecule, altering the coordination polyhedra of the lanthanide centre⁶⁶ (Fig. 1c), if the deck-to-deck distance is large enough. Late lanthanide complexes, including Lu with the smallest radius, do not allow intramolecular inclusion of alkali cations and form the extended nanowires through intermolecular connections of doubledeckers by potassium cations^{62,63,65}. This leads to very high electron conductivity of the final material up to 11.4 S·cm^{-1 65}. In contrast, a similar strategy for the middle lanthanides results in an electron conductivity that is 8 orders of magnitude lower. The reason for this difference has not been studied in detail, but our work reveals an important factor for that. Here we report comprehensive solution and single crystal X-ray diffraction characterization of the product of intramolecular potassium ion inclusion in the double-decker gadolinium complex Gd[(15C5)₄Pc]₂. This is the first direct structural characterization of the alkali cations intercalation into double-decker lanthanide complexes with crown phthalocyanines. We demonstrate

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Fig. 1 Examples of cation-induced supramolecular assembly of crown-substituted sandwich lanthanide phthalocyanines.

that for the middle lanthanide double-deckers, supramolecular assembly can additionally control the redox state of the ligand which is crucial for the electron conductivity³⁷.

Results and discussion

Supramolecular assembly of Gd[(15C5)₄Pc]₂ (I) in solution

The neutral form of the double-decker complexes $[(15C5)_4Pc^2-]Ln^{3+}[(15C5)_4Pc^{-\bullet}]^0$ possess characteristic spectra corresponding to $\pi - \pi^*$ transitions in macrocyclic ligands, including a high-intensity Q band in the range of 660–690 nm; a radical band in the range of 480-510 nm, assigned to the presence of one unpaired electron distributed between two phthalocyanines, as well as B (Soret) bands at 350-400 (Fig. 2, Fig. S1). Owing to macrocyclic substituents, the bis(tetra-15-crown-5)-phthalocyaninate $Ln[(15C5)_4Pc_2]_2$ can form sandwich complexes with alkali cations such as potassium or rubidium. It is known that for the double-decker complexes of the middle lanthanides it results in two possible processes: intramolecular binding of the alkali cations with the formation of inclusion complex (Fig. 1c) or intermolecular cofacial binding of adjacent molecules with the formation of 1D oligomers (Fig. 1b) ^{51,67}. Each kind of interaction leads to characteristic changes in UV-vis spectra. Intramolecular binding leads to a red shift of the Q-band of the complex⁶⁷. When assembling into 1D structures, a significant broadening and decrease in the Q-band intensity, along with a slight blue-shift, are observed⁶⁵. It is important to emphasize that none of these structures for double-deckers were characterized by crystallographic data.

Herein we used the neutral radical complex Gd[(15C5)₄PC]₂^{0•} (I) for titration with potassium salts. The titration of I solution in CHCl₃-CH₃OH by KOPiv methanol solution in the conditions similar to⁶⁶ allowed to register two parallel processes (Fig. 2): the unexpected formation of specie II with drastically blue-shifted Qband from 674 nm to 646 nm and the formation of the expected *intra*molecular inclusion complex III with Q-band at 698 nm. The second process of *intra*molecular cations inclusion agrees well with previous experience⁶⁷: by inclusion of K⁺ the distance between decks increases due to the large ionic radius of K⁺ and all different lanthanide complexes independent from ion radius have similar spectra with Q-band around 698 nm. However, the appearance of sharp new bands of an unknown species II is different from both that we could expect – *intra*molecular K⁺ inclusion or *inter*molecular oligomers formation.

Interestingly, once the titration is complete with a high excess of KOPiv (50 eq), the spectra change with time, shifting the equilibrium

further towards the formation of the unknown species II (Fig. S2), indicating a slow kinetics of II formation. We decided to study the process in detail and determine the structure of the previously unknown complex II.

The same spectral changes were observed when using another potassium salt, KOAc (Fig. S3). However, when testing potassium salts of strong acids like KBr (see Fig. 3), KOPic (Fig. S4), KSCN (Fig. S5), and KPF₆ (Fig. S6), only the formation of the *intra*molecular inclusion complex **III** with a stable Q-band at 698 nm was observed. This confirms the anionic selectivity in the electrochromic properties of Gd[(15C5)₄Pc]₂, as previously found in⁶⁷ for other lanthanides: titration by potassium salts of strong acids results in red-shift and the color of solution changes from green to purple, with the potassium salts of weak acids blue-shift occurs and the color changes from green to blue (Fig. S7).

The fact that the formation of the new complex **II** is detected only when using salts of weak acids suggests that the hydrolysis of potassium salts plays a crucial role. In all titration experiments we used methanol as solvent for potassium salts, which can contain traces of water. Salts of strong acids and strong bases yield a neutral pH when they hydrolyze, while salts of weak acids and strong bases result in a basic pH.



Fig. 2 Spectrophotometric titration of the solution of complex I in CHCl₃:CH₃OH = 4 : 1 (c = 11.4 μ M) with the solution of KOPiv in CH₃OH (c = 2.85 mM). The inset shows the titration curves.



Fig. 3 Spectrophotometric titration of the solution of complex I in CHcl₃ (c = 10.0μ M) with the solution of KBr in CH₃OH (c = 1.52 mM). The inset shows the titration curves.

Phthalocyanine double-deckers are known to be reduced in basic conditions⁶⁸. Therefore, our suggestion is that when using KOPiv or KOAc, we observe inclusion of K^+ cations and subsequent reduction of ligand in basic conditions.

Verification of supramolecular induced reduction of I

Indeed, double-decker Gd complex with phthalocyanines can exist in three redox forms and each form has its characteristic spectra (Fig. 4, Scheme 1, Table S1): neutral radical form $Gd[(15C5)_4Pc]_2^{0\bullet}(I)$, reduced anionic form $Gd[(15C5)_4Pc]_2^{-}(I^{-})$ and oxidized cationic form $Gd[(15C5)_4Pc]_2^{+}(I^{+})$. The switching between the forms can be easily achieved by use of corresponding reducing (hydrazine hydrate N_2H_4) or oxidizing agent (traces of Br_2 in N-bromosuccinimide NBS).

$$[(Pc^{-})Gd^{3+}(Pc^{-})]^{+} \xrightarrow{+e} [(Pc^{2-})Gd^{3+}(Pc^{-})]^{0} \xrightarrow{+e} [(Pc^{2-})Gd^{3+}(Pc^{2-})]^{-}$$
Orange
Green
Blue
Scheme 1 Three redox forms of complex I.

The reduction of the complex I results in the disappearance of characteristic band of unpaired electron at 480 nm and the blue-shift of Q-bands – similar changes to what we observe during the formation of II. However, the value of blue-shift and final spectra of I^- differs from II.



Fig. 5 Spectrophotometric titration of the solution of complex $Gd[(15C5)_4Pc]_2^- = I^-$ in $CHCl_3 : CH_3OH = 10 : 1 (c = 8.20\mu M)$ with the solution of KOPiv in CH_3OH (c = 0.2 mM). The inset shows the titration curves.

When we started the titration by KOPiv from reduced anionic I⁻complex we obtained absolutely the same specie II with Qband at 646 nm (Fig. 5). The formation of specie II is much faster compared to initial titrations of neutral form I, which can be explain by the slow kinetics of the reduction step in slightly basic conditions.

It is known that switching between redox states causes modulation of near-IR absorbance, and the nature of the NIR bands of neutral green complexes is determined by unpaired electron and has been previously discussed^{69 70}. We measured NIR spectra for initial complex I and supramolecular complexes II and III. The complex I has a broad band around 1600 cm⁻¹. When a KBr solution is added to the complex, we observe a redshift in this band, indicating the formation of an inclusion complex. However, when KOPiv is added, the intensity of the band decreases over time, suggesting that the complex loses an unpaired electron on the ligand (Fig. S8).

It is known that the lanthanide double-decker complexes with larger ion size reduces easier than the complexes with small ion radius^{71–73}. Our hypothesis is that inclusion of K⁺ cations in double-decker results in two main structural changes: *i*) twist of ligands and change of coordination polyhedron of Gd(III), *ii*) increase of distance between ligands due to the large size of potassium cations. As a result, double-decker of middle lanthanide becomes similar to complexes of early lanthanides with larger size and can be reduced easier in slightly basic conditions. In order to verify the structural changes during K⁺ inclusion, the single crystals of I and II were grown.

Fig. 4 UV-vis absorption spectra of Gd(III) complexes with $(15C5)_4Pc$ in CHCl₃. Three electronic forms: neutral radical Gd[$(15C5)_4Pc$]₂⁰⁺ = I (green), reduced anionic Gd[$(15C5)_4Pc$]₂⁻ = I⁺(blue) and oxidized cationic Gd[$(15C5)_4Pc$]₂⁺= I⁺ (orange).



Fig. 6 Top and side views of the single-crystal X-ray diffraction structures of the complexes I and II: $Gd[(15C5)_4Pc]_2 \cdot 6Ph_2O$ and $[{Gd}[(15C5)_4Pc]_2 \cdot 4K^{+}^{3+}$. Piv⁻. HPiv⁻2Cl⁻]·13CHCl₃·2H₂O. The H atoms, solvent molecules, and counterions are not shown for clarity.

We succeeded in growing the single crystals of both - initial double-decker I and the product of its interaction with KOPiv complex II. Single crystal XRD (SCXRD) allowed for the first time and unambiguously prove the formation of intramolecular inclusion complex for double-decker of middle lanthanide and showed that using KOPiv methanol solution we obtain reduced form of ligand (Fig. 6). The crystallographic data, refinement parameters, bond lengths and angles, asymmetric units, and location of the charge-compensating anions in Gd[(15C5)₄Pc]₂·6Ph₂O and [{Gd[(15C5)₄Pc]₂⁻·4K⁺}³⁺·PivO⁻·PivOH·2Cl⁻]·13CHCl₃·2H₂O are represented in Fig. S9–S11 and Tables S2–S7. The reduced form of the double-decker is determined from the charge balance of observed anions and the complex (see ESI for details, SCXRD section).

Single crystal diffraction analysis confirmed that the intramolecular binding of K+ ions induced significant molecular motion by twisting of the decks and simultaneously changed the redox state of the ligand. Phthalocyanines twist changes the skew angle between them from 44.61° to 0.21° and switches the coordination polyhedron of Gd(III) from SAP (square antiprismatic) to SP (square prismatic) (Fig. 6) in analogy to previously reported triple-decker complexes⁶⁶. The inclusion of K⁺ ions causes a significant change in geometry, affecting specific bond lengths and distances, as shown in Table 1. This includes an increase in the interligand distance between the N₄ planes of crown-substituted ligands from 2.805(10) to 3.016(8) Å and an elongation of Gd-N(Pc) distances from 2.423(2) to 2.480(2) Å. The increase in distance between ligands can be attributed to a combination of three factors: the π - π repulsion of forced eclipsed crown-Pc decks, as demonstrated by DFT calculations $^{\rm 66}$, the inclusion of large size potassium cations, and the one-electron reduction of phthalocyanines. The reduction is known to increase the deck-to-deck distance, as previously observed in variously substituted tetrapyrrole Gd doubledecker crystal structures in distinct redox states^{74–76}. The distance between ligands in {Gd[(15C5)₄Pc]₂⁻·4K⁺}³⁺·is closer to

those in tetrapyrrole triple-decker Gd complexes^{75,77} (Table S3), which typically exceeds the distances in double-deckers. In contrast to inclusion complex of triple-decker $[Y^*,Y]$ ·4KBPh₄⁶⁶ where the forced eclipsing of the crown-Pc ligands resulted in their deviation from planarity, in this case, we observe that the phthalocyanine rings become flatter after potassium intercalation (Fig. 6, Table 1). This is due to the one-electron reduction of the ligand, which reduces the repulsion between decks and increases the deck-to-deck distance.

Thus, the addition of KOPiv to I results in the *intra*molecular inclusion of K^+ with subsequent one-electron reduction of phthalocyanine. This is a completely new observation, never reported before.

crystal	I	=
formula	Gd[(15C5) ₄ Pc] ₂	[{Gd[(15C5) ₄ Pc] ₂ ⁻ ·4K ⁺ } ³⁺ ·PivO ⁻ ·
	·6Ph₂O	·PivOH·2Cl [−]]·13CHCl ₃ ·2H ₂ O
Bond Length (Å)		
M–N _{iso} , Å	2.4032(17) -	2.466(11) - 2.496(11)
	2.4318(17)	
M–N _{iso} , Å,	2.423(2)	2.480(2)
av.		
Plane distances (Å)		
N4 – N4, Å	2.805(10)	3.016(8)
M–N4, Å	1.401 - 1.404	1.508
Skew Angle (deg) ^a		
	44.61	0.21
Deviation from Planarity		
(deg) ^b	5.0 - 13.8	2.7 – 8.9
Åc	0.135, 0.137	0.085
Average tersion angle N1 Cg1 Cg2 N2 where Cg1 and Cg2 are the		

Table 1 Selected Structural Characteristics of I and II According to Single-Crystal X-ray Diffraction Studies

^a Average torsion angle N1–Cg1–Cg2–N2, where Cg1 and Cg2 are the centroids of the corresponding N₄ planes, ^b Dihedral angles between the isoindoline rings and the corresponding N₄ plane, ^c RMSD of atoms from the plane of 24 atoms

Conclusions

Summarizing obtained results, it was demonstrated the supramolecular controlled ligand reduction of double-decker Gd phthalocyaninate. The increased distance between ligands resulting from the supramolecular inclusion of potassium cations facilitates switching of redox state. The case reported here is a rare example of dynamic control simultaneously over the coordination environment of the Ln ion and the redox state of the ligand, achieved through large-amplitude molecular motion in the context of supramolecular self-assembly.

Author Contributions

The manuscript was written through the contributions of all authors. All authors have given approval to the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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Notes and references

‡ CCDC 2323888 and 2323889 contain the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif,orby emailing data_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk, or by contacting The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre, 12 Union Road, Cambridge CB2 1EZ, UK; fax: +44 1223 336033.

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