Synthesis of $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ from Mechanically Activated Precursors

D. KLISURSKY$^1$, M. MANCHEVA$^1$, R. IORDANOVA$^1$ and B. KUNEV$^2$

$^1$Institute of General and Inorganic Chemistry, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, G. Bonchev str., bl. 11, Sofia 1113 (Bulgaria)
E-mail: dklis@igic.bas.bg
E-mail: mi720@abv.bg

$^2$Institute of Catalysis, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, G. Bonchev str., bl. 11, Sofia 1113 (Bulgaria)

Abstract

The effect of mechanical activation on the synthesis of $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ is studied. Its formation was monitored by X-ray diffraction (XRD) and infrared spectroscopy (IR). Shape and size of the product particles were studied by scanning electron microscopy (SEM). The compound studied presents a special interest as a catalyst for mild oxidation of alcohols. A stoichiometric mixture of $\text{Cr(OH)}_3$ and $\text{MoO}_3$ in a $2:3$ molar ratio was subjected to intense mechanical treatment in a planetary ball mill (Fritsch-7) for different periods of time, followed by calcination at various temperatures. The $2.5 \text{ h}$ milling produced broadening and decrease in the intensity of the $\text{MoO}_3$ XRD peaks, while the principle peaks of $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$ appeared. Further milling ($5 \text{ h}$) resulted in complete amorphization of the reagent mixture. IR spectroscopic analysis indicated occurrence of structural transformation in the mixture of solid reagents during the mechanical activation. These phase and structural changes are a precondition for a drastic decrease in the temperature of classical solid state synthesis of $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ from $700$ to $400 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$.

INTRODUCTION

Many compounds of $\text{A}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ and $\text{A}_2(\text{WO}_4)_3$ types are known and have been the subject of scientific and practical interest. Chromium molybdate $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$, has special magnetic, electrical and catalytic properties [1–3] and is interesting as a catalyst for mild oxidation of alcohols. The $\text{Sc}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ structure type consisting of corner shared $\text{Mo}_6$ octahedra and $\text{MoO}_4$ tetrahedra is characteristic of $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ [4, 5]. There is a low-temperature monoclinic modification of $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ which is transformed into orthorhombic one at $385 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$. It is established that chromium molybdate melts incongruently at $800–810 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ [6].

$\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ is usually obtained by several methods: solid state synthesis [7–9], precipitation method [3, 6] or thermal decomposition of chromate and molybdate sols [10]. The synthesis methods of the compound strongly affect its properties. One of the promising approaches is the mechanical activation of the reagents [11].

The aim of the present study is to obtain crystalline $\text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3$ by mechanochemically assisted synthesis, in order to prevent the processes of sintering and aggregation of the product particles.

EXPERIMENTAL

One of the starting compounds was amorphous $\text{Cr(OH)}_3$ prepared from a $\text{Cr(NO}_3)_3$ solution, precipitated with $\text{NH}_4\text{OH}$ ($0.6 \text{ M}$) at a final $\text{pH} 9$. The precipitate was washed with distilled water and dried at $100 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for $10 \text{ h}$. A mixture of $\text{Cr(OH)}_3$ and $\text{MoO}_3$ (Merck) in a $2:3$ molar ratio was subjected to intense mechanical treatment using a planetary ball mill (Fritsch Pulverisette-7) for different periods of time (2.5, 5 and $7.5 \text{ h}$). After mechanical activation, the reagents were subjected to calcination at dif-
ferent temperatures (350, 400, 450 °C). The synthesis was carried out in air. Both the mechanically activated reagent mixtures and the thermally treated were ones analysed by X-ray diffraction (XRD) (TYP G2M CoKα radiation). The changes of the structural units of the mechanically and termally treated samples were investigated by infrared spectroscopy in the 1200–400 cm⁻¹ region using the KBr pellet technique (Nicolet-320 FTIR spectrometer). The granule size and morphology of the obtained samples were analysed by SEM photography (Jeol-357).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

X-ray diffraction analysis

X-ray diffraction patterns of the initial mixtures before and after different times of mechanical treatment are shown in Fig. 1, a–c. The XRD data on the sample not subjected to mechanical activation exhibit the main peaks of MoO₃ (35-0609 JCPDS). After a milling time of 2.5 h, partial amorphisation takes place, the

![Fig. 1. X-ray patterns of reagent mixture before mechanical treatment (a), after 2.5 (b) and 5 h (c) mechanical treatment.](image)

![Fig. 2. XRD patterns of the reagent mixture after milling for 2.5 (a) and 5 h (b) thermal treatment for 3 h at 350 (1), 400 (2) and 450 °C (3).](image)
principal peaks of MoO$_3$ are broadened and decrease in intensity and the main peak of Cr$_2$O$_3$ (38-1479 JCPDS) appears. This is an indication that the long-range order of MoO$_3$ is destroyed and the sample is more disperse. Further milling (5 h) leads to complete amorphisation of the sample. These changes are associated with formation of defects and their accumulation in the reagent crystal lattices. Figure 2, a–c shows X-ray patterns of the samples activated (milled for 2.5 h) and heated at different temperatures. The formation of $m$-Cr$_2$(MoO$_4$)$_3$ starts at 350 °C. Principal peaks of $m$-Cr$_2$(MoO$_4$)$_3$ along with peaks of the reagents (MoO$_3$ and Cr$_2$O$_3$) appear on the XRD patterns after heating at this temperature (see Fig. 2, a). Diffraction patterns of the activated samples heated at higher temperatures (400 and 450 °C) show presence of all diffraction lines characteristic of $m$-Cr$_2$(MoO$_4$)$_3$ (20-0310 JCPDS) and traces of MoO$_3$ (35-0609 JCPDS) (see Fig. 2, b, c). The presence of small amounts of MoO$_3$ is observed during XRD analysis by other authors [6, 12].

**Infrared analysis**

The structural transformation undergone by mechanically and thermally-treated specimens was studied by infrared spectroscopy. Figure 3, a–d shows the infrared spectra of the initial mixtures before and after different times of mechanical activation. In the IR spectrum (see Fig. 3, a) of the non-activated sample there are bands characteristic of vibrations of MoO$_6$ polyhedra building MoO$_3$ [13, 14]. The band at 990 cm$^{-1}$ corresponds to stretching modes of a Mo=O terminal bond present in each octahedron. The bands at 880 and 820 cm$^{-1}$ are assigned to stretching vibrations of OMO$_2$ (Mo–O–Mo) entity [13]. The absorption bands below 600 cm$^{-1}$ represent superposition of stretching vibrations of OMO$_6$ units and CrO$_6$ polyhedra [14–16]. The IR spectra (see Fig. 3, b–d) of the sample obtained after mechanochemical treatment for different times show a change in absorption bands. After mechanical activation (2.5–7.5 h) the absorption bands at 880 and 820 cm$^{-1}$ are broadened and their intensity changes (see Fig. 3, b–d). High frequency (990 cm$^{-1}$) and low frequency bands (below 600 cm$^{-1}$) are absent. These spectroscopic results are an indication of destruction of the long range order of the reagents.

The IR spectra of samples mechanically activated and calcined at 350, 400 and 450 °C (Fig. 4, a, b) are typical of $m$-Cr$_2$(MoO$_4$)$_3$ [10, 17]. The high frequency bands at 990 and 970 cm$^{-1}$ are due to activation of $v_1$ vibrations of the distorted MoO$_4$ tetrahedra building the $m$-Cr$_2$(MoO$_4$)$_3$ crystal structure [3, 10, 17]. The bands at 870 and 820 cm$^{-1}$ are attributed to $v_3$ vibrations of the same groups. The bands below 600 cm$^{-1}$ may be assigned to vibrations of MoO$_6$ units from MoO$_3$ present in these specimens [14]. This result is in agreement with XRD data which show the presence of MoO$_3$.

Figure 5 presents a SEM image of the product obtained at 400 °C from a mechanically amorphized sample. Globular aggregates consisting of spherical particles of Cr$_2$(MoO$_4$)$_3$ with submicrometer sizes are visible. Needle-like particles of MoO$_3$ can also be seen. This picture corresponds to the XRD data. We believe that a small correction of the ratio between the reagents will lead to a single phase product.
CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates the favourable effect of the mechanochemical treatment on the synthesis of \( \text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3 \). The mechanochemical treatment of the initial mixture leads to a drastic decrease in the synthesis temperature of \( \text{Cr}_2(\text{MoO}_4)_3 \) from 700 to 400 °C. Studies that are now in progress show that the purity of the reaction product can be further improved. It is shown that mechanical activation leads to completely amorphized samples. The SEM image of the product reveals particles with a mean size below 2 µm.

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