Chemical Engineering of Photoactivity in Heterometallic Titanium-Organic Frameworks by Metal Doping

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Abstract: We report a new family of titanium-organic frameworks that enlarges the limited number of crystalline, porous materials available for this metal. They are chemically robust and can be prepared as single crystals at multi-gram scale from multiple precursors. Their heterometallic structure enables engineering of their photoactivity by metal doping rather than by linker functionalization. Compared to other methodologies based on the post-synthetic metallation of MOFs, our approach is well fitted for controlling the positioning of dopants at an atomic level to gain more precise control over the band gap and electronic properties of the porous solid. Changes in the band gap are also rationalized with computational modelling and experimentally confirmed by photocatalytic H₂ production.

Metal-Organic Frameworks (MOFs) are crystalline, molecular solids built from the linking of organic and inorganic components with coordinative bonds. MOFs feature incomparable chemical diversity and sizeable three-dimensional porosity ideal for applications like gas storage, separation or catalysis.^[1,2] However, they often suffer from poor chemical stability –particularly in humid conditions– limiting their performance and preventing large-scale application.^[3] Chemically robust MOFs can be produced by using basic nitrogenated linkers^[4,5] or highly charged metals like Zr or Hf(IV),^[6-8] for endowing the framework with stronger metal-linker bonds less prone to hydrolysis.

Compared to these metals, titanium is naturally more abundant and features advantageous properties like low toxicity, redox versatility and potential photocatalytic activity. However, the synthesis of carboxylate-bridged Ti(IV), crystalline, porous materials remains still a synthetic challenge.^[9] This is arguably due to the high reactivity of Ti precursors, which are prone to hydrolysis in the solvothermal conditions conventional to MOF synthesis to form amorphous TiO₂. As result, only a few Ti(IV)-MOFs like MIL-125,^[10] NTU-9^[11] and COK-69^[12] –synthesised from simple Ti precursors– or PCN-22^[13] and PCN-415^[14] –by using preformed clusters–, have been prepared by direct reaction with polycarboxylate linkers.

Applications of Ti-MOFs in photocatalysis are continuously expanding due to the unique properties that can arise from the

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combination of high surface area, crystallinity good photo-stability and photo-activity.^[15,16] Moreover, compared to traditional inorganic semiconductors like TiO₂, photocatalytic activity can be finely tuned by direct modification of the organic linker to enhance light absorption in the visible region. This can be attained by functionalization of the linker with substituents to shift light absorption as exemplified by NH₂-MIL-125.^[17-19] Still, other routes often used with oxide semiconductors remain underexplored. Here we present a new family of chemically robust, photoactive titanium-organic frameworks coined MUV-10 (MUV = Materials of Universidad de Valencia), that can be prepared as single-crystals at multi-gram scale. Compared to other Ti-MOFs, their structure is based on heterometallic SBUs. We use this feature to investigate the impact of incorporating open-shell metals over the electronic structure of the framework for tunable photoactivity.

MUV-10(Ca) was first synthesized by solvothermal reaction of titanium (IV) isopropoxide, calcium chloride and trimesic acid (H₃btc: benzene-1.3.5-tricarboxvlic acid) in N.Ndimethylformamide (DMF), by using acetic acid as modulator (SI2). Heating at 120 °C for 48 hours results in quantitative formation of colourless, octahedral crystals of micrometric size of formula $[Ti^{V_3}Ca^{II_3}(\mu_3-O)_2(btc)_4(H_2O)_6]$ solvent (Figure 1). MUV-10(Ca) is a three-dimensional, porous solid built from the interlinking of fully deprotonated trimesate anions and tetranuclear Ti^{IV}₂Ca^{II}₂(μ_3 -O)₂(H₂O)₄(CO₂)₈ clusters (**Figure 2a**). The SBU is composed of six-coordinated octahedral Ti(IV) and six-coordinated Ca(II) centres with a trigonal prismatic geometry, that are interconnected by eight carboxylates acting as μ_2 -bridges, two μ_3 -oxo anions and water molecules to complete the positions left at their coordination sphere. There are examples of neutral clusters with this structure in the literature (Table S2) but, as far as we know, this SBU remained still missing in MOF chemistry. Overall, each tetranuclear cluster is connected to eight neighbouring SBUs by eight btc linkers, four above and four below the plane of the tetramer, to conform a neutral framework with cubic symmetry (Figure 2b). The SBU was found to be in a twofold rotational disorder without affecting the overall structure (Figure S2a-b). For a clearer structural description, Figure 2c shows the underlying net of MUV-10(Ca) as calculated with



Figure 1. Size and morphology of as-made MUV-10(Ca) crystals examined with a) optical microscope and b) SEM.



Figure 2. Structure of MUV-10(Ca). a) Ti^{IV}₂Ca^{II}₂(µ₃-O)₂(H₂O)₄(CO₂)₈ tetramers acting as SBUs. b) Perspective along [001] showing the overall structure of the 3,8connected framework. c) Natural tiling of polyhedral cages in the the underlying net of MUV-10. d) Internal structure of the sodalite-type octahedral cages.

ToposPro^[20] and Systre^[21]. Each btc unit acts as a 3-c node and links 8-c SBUs into a (3,8)-connected the net. This topology is quite elusive but has been reported for frameworks based on the combination of M^{II}₄CI (M=Mn, Cu) and Zr₆O₄(OH)₄(RCO₂)₁₂ SBUs with linkers featuring D_{3h} symmetry either for tetrazolate^[22] or carboxylate connectors.^[23-25] This arrangement results in an open framework with 3D intersected channels and octahedral cages formed by six SBUs and eight btc molecules, that account for a solvent-accessible volume close to 50% of the total (Table S5). The resulting sodalite-type cages can accommodate spheres with an internal diameter of 1.2 nm and display square windows with free apertures slightly above 0.5 nm (Figure 2d).

The synthetic difficulties inherent to the production of Ti-MOFs is one of the key limitations for further development in this area. This pushed us to optimize its synthesis and investigate the effect of the metal precursor over the solids formed. MUV-10(Ca) can be produced at a gram-scale with yields close to 90% by simple upscaling of reagents. We selected a list of different precursors commonly used in the synthesis of Ti-MOFs like Ti(IV) isopropoxide, $^{[10,11]}$ Cp_2TiCl_2^{[12]} or a preformed Ti_6O_6(O^iPr)_6(O_2C)_6 SBU.^[14,26] Our experiments confirm that MUV-10(Ca) can be prepared as single-crystals in all cases. The precursor only affects their size moderately, that increases from 10 to 50 µm according to the sequence $Cp_2TiCl_2 > Ti_6O_6(O^iPr)_6(O_2C)_6 > Ti(O^iPr)_4$ (Figure S1).

Phase purity was confirmed by LeBail refinement of the powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD, Figure S7a), thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) and scanning electron microscopy (SEM). MUV-10(Ca) remains stable up to 450 °C (Figure S8). This thermal

MUV-10(Ca) displays type-I reversible N2 adsorption with no hysteresis, characteristic of microporous materials (Figure 3a). The multi-point BET surface area was found to be 1041 m²·g⁻¹ with a total pore volume of 0.40 cm³.g⁻¹ (Table S4, Figure S9). Analysis of the pore size distribution (PSD) by using non-linear density functional theory (NLDFT) methods reveals a homogeneous pore diameter of 10.3 Å, that agrees well the value of 12.0 Å calculated from the structure. MUV-10(Ca) also adsorbs a significant amount of CO2, 4.56 mmol·g⁻¹ (20.1 wt%) at 293 K and 1 bar, with an isosteric heat of adsorption of 27.7 kJ.mol⁻¹ (Figure S11). Although the introduction of divalent metals in the SBU might act as weak points towards hydrolysis, compromising the stability of the material, MUV-10(Ca) maintains its structural integrity between pH 2 and 12. According to the PXRD LeBail refinements (Figures 3b and S14-16) and N2 adsorption measurements (Figure 3a, Table S6), soaking of the solid in concentrated solutions of HCI and NaOH(aq) during 24 hours does not affect its crystallinity or surface area. As pointed out in the introduction, there is a limited number of MOFs showing hydrolytical stability in these conditions. MUV-10(Ca) shows excellent chemical stability, comparable to other benchmark materials,^[3] likely due to the presence of strong Ti-O coordination bonds in the structure.

Asides chemical stability, Ti(IV) nodes are also expected to render photoactive MOFs. To investigate this possibility, we calculated the electronic structure of MUV-10(Ca) by using density functional theory (DFT; see SI6 for computational methodology). As shown in Figure 4a, the electronic density of states diagram (DOS) suggests that this material is a





semiconductor with a band gap of 3.1 eV, in good agreement with the optical value extracted from diffuse reflectance spectroscopy (DRS) measurements according to the Kubelka-Munk function (Figure S12). Similar to other Ti-MOFs,^[12,14,18] the conduction band (CB) is dominated by Ti 3d orbitals, whereas the valence band (VB) is composed mainly by 2p orbitals from the aromatic btc units. The calculated band gap is compatible with UV light photoactivity. To probe this point, we irradiated MUV-10(Ca) in drv deoxygenated THF with UV-B light (λ = 280-315 nm). This produced a change in color from white to dark brown in less than 2 hours. This change remains



Figure 4. Electronic structure of MUV-10 family. a) Total electronic density of states (DOS, black curve) for MUV-10(Ca) (top) and MUV-10(Mn) (bottom) calculated by using the screened hybrid functional HSE06. Contribution of Ti, Ca, Mn, C and O atoms to the DOS are shown in colour. The valence band and conduction band edges are indicated with a dashed line. b) Electron density in the VB (yellow) and CB (red) of MUV-10(Ca) (top) and MUV-10(Mn) (bottom).

stable with time and reverts back instantaneously by exposure of the solid to open air. As shown in **Figure 3c**, the Electron Paramagnetic Resonance (EPR) spectra of MUV-10(Ca) before and after irradiation shows the appearance of two signals only for the last. A broad signal at 0.35 T with g fitted parameters g_{II} = 1.975 and g_{\perp} = 1.946, characteristic of Ti(III) species, and a sharper one at lower fields with a g = 2.00 that can be attributed to the formation of btc radicals. This is indicative of the photoreduction of the linker to generate an excited state that transfers the charge to the Ti(IV) metal nodes upon ligand-tometal charge transfer (LMCT).

MOFs featuring LMCTs like MIL-125 are arguably preferable for photocatalytic purposes due to more efficient charge separation if compared to other systems in which photoexcitation only affects isolated linkers or metals.[27] Also, MUV-10(Ca) displays excellent chemical stability key to circumvent the drastic conditions often used in photocatalytic experiments. However, we identified its inability to operate with visible light as an important limitation in this context. As exemplified for MIL-125-NH2 and UiO-NH₂ families, more efficient light harvesting can be accomplished by ligand engineering.^[18,19] The structure of MUV-10, seemed instead more adequate to investigate the effect of incorporating open-shell metals over its photoactivity. In order to identify the best candidate, we calculated the enthalpies and free energies for exchanging Ca(II) with several transition metal cations. Our calculations suggested that the incorporation of Mn(II) to the heterometallic clusters in MUV-10 was more favourable thermodynamically (S6, Table S8). This prediction is consistent with previous theoretical studies, suggesting that metals with high-spin d⁵ configurations like Mn(II) prefer a trigonal prism coordination.^[28] Accordingly, we prepared MUV-10(Mn) by direct synthesis by following the same procedure used for the Ca phase. This derivative is isostructural to the calcium analogue as confirmed by LeBail refinement of the PXRD (Figure S7b).

Equimolar ratio of Ti and Mn was confirmed with SEM (Figure S6). MUV-10(Mn) also displays equivalent thermal stability (Figure S8), N₂ and CO₂ sorption capabilities (Table S4, Figures S10-11) than MUV-10(Ca), with minimum changes associated to a slight contraction of the unit cell due to the smaller ionic radius of Mn(II) (0.83 vs. 1.06 Å). We also examined the chemical stability of MUV-10(Mn) in extreme acid and basic conditions. According to the PXRD (Figures S17-19) and N₂ sorption analysis (Figure S21, Table S7), the structure and porosity of the solid remains intact after water treatment between a broader range of pH, from 1 to 12. We attribute this increase in stability to the presence of stronger Mn-O coordination bonds. As shown in Figure 4a, the incorporation of Mn(II) units to the structure of MUV-10 also affects its electronic structure, reducing the band gap to 2.6 eV. This is consistent with the experimental red shift of the absorption peak in the DRS for an optical band gap of 2.56 eV (Figure S12). This change is directly linked to the introduction of d electrons. Closed-shell Ca(II) centers in MUV-10(Ca), only contribute to the DOS deep inside the VB states without modifying the electronic structure around the band gap. In turn, d orbitals from Mn(II) contribute significantly to the upper VB for a narrowing of the band gap (Figure 4b). Photoactivity was next confirmed by the EPR of MUV-10(Mn). We observed a change of color into dark blue upon irradiation, suggesting the formation of Ti(III) species also centered at 0.35 T. Unfortunately, the coupling with the electronic spin of paramagnetic Mn(II) difficulties further analysis (Figure S13b).

For a clearer demonstration of the superior activity of MUV-10(Mn) with visible light, we next tested the activity of both derivatives as photocatalysts for H₂ generation. Irradiation of a suspension of the solids in H₂O:CH₃OH with a Xe lamp (300 W) confirms that the Mn phase doubles the activity of the Ca one with a production of 6500 μ mol.g⁻¹ of H₂ after 24 hours of irradiation (**Figure 5**, see **SI7** for experimental details). Although differences



Figure 5. Photocatalytic generation of hydrogen after 24 hours of irradiation. We used 25 mg of MOF in 25 mL of $H_2O:CH_3OH$ (4:1) in both measurements.

in the experimental setup prevent direct comparison, MUV-10(Mn) seems to display a superior photocatalytic activity than the benchmark NH₂-MIL-125 under similar conditions.^[17]

MOFs are relatively new materials in the field of photoactivated transformations but they are receiving increasing attention due to their structural and chemical tunability. Here we report a new family of heterometallic titanium-organic frameworks that enlarges the limited number of crystalline, porous materials available. MUV-10 materials can be prepared as single-crystals at a multi-gram scale and display excellent chemical stability. The heterometallic clusters in their structure conforms and excellent platform to manipulate their electronic structure and photoactivity by metal doping rather than linker functionalization. Compared to other methodologies based on post-synthetic metal exchange of Ti-MOFs,^[26,29] our approach is simpler and better fitted for controlling the positioning of dopants at an atomic level at doping levels as high as 50%. Based on their high-stability and tunable photoactivity, we expect this new family of materials to accelerate the design of advanced Ti-MOF photocatalysts.

Acknowledgements

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that Universidad de Valencia has applied for a patent on the materials discussed herein, on which J.C.-G., N.M.P. and C.M.-G. are included as inventors. C.M.-G. has a financial interest in MatCO, a startup company working to commercialize metal-organic frameworks for photocatalytic applications. **Keywords:** metal-organic frameworks • titanium • bandgap engineering • metal doping • photocatalysis

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Metal doping in titanium MOFs: MUV-10 are crystalline, porous titanium frameworks with excellent chemical stability in water. The presence of heterometallic clusters in their structure enables chemical engineering of the bandgap by suitable doping with open shell metals rather than by linker functionalization. This is confirmed by computational modelling of the electronic structure of this family of solids and correlated with their photocatalytic activity for H₂ production.



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