Title: Transformation Products of Iron(III) : Hydroxide by Hydrolysis at Elevated Temperatures between 50 and 90℃

(Commemoration Issue Dedicated to Professor Tsunenobu Shigematsu on the Occasion of his Retirement)

Author(s): Kiyama, Masao; Takada, Toshio

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Transformation Products of Iron(III) Hydroxide by Hydrolysis at Elevated Temperatures between 50 and 90°C

Masao KIYAMA and Toshio TAKADA*

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Aqueous suspensions of gelatinous precipitates, prepared by mixing solutions of NaOH and one of iron(III) sulfate, chloride or nitrate in various ratios (R) of OH-/Cl- or NO3-, or 2OH-/SO42-, were subjected to aging at temperatures between 50 and 90°C. All of the aging products thus obtained were examined by X-ray powder diffraction, some further by chemical analysis, electron-microscopic observation and magnetic measurements. In alkaline media with R > 1, the gelatinous precipitates transform into α-FeO(OH) with or without α-Fe2O3 depending on the aging temperature. For R < 1, the gelatinous precipitates dissolve into the acidic media and precipitates of α-, β-FeO(OH), α-Fe2O3 and NaFe3(SO4)2(OH)6 are gradually formed depending on the aging temperature and the kind and concentration of the acid anion present. When LiOH is used as a precipitant in place of NaOH, the transformation into a ferromagnetic precipitate, LiFe5O8, takes place in an alkaline medium at 50°C regardless of the kind of acid anion, whereas a basic iron sulfate can scarcely be formed in the acidic media. A variety of product formation in the acidic media can be explained on the basis of hydrolysis of iron(III) polynuclear complexes present in the media prior to the formation of precipitates.

KEY WORDS: Aging / Iron(III) hydroxide sulfates / Iron(III) oxide hydroxides / Particle shapes /

INTRODUCTION

When an alkaline solution is added to an iron(III) salt solution, a brownish and gelatinous substance usually called iron(III) hydroxide is formed. The properties of the gelatinous precipitates, prepared by mixing solutions of aqueous ammonia and iron(III) nitrate, had earlier been studied closely by Giessen.1) The gelatinous precipitate is stable in a neutral medium,1) but unstable in an acidic or alkaline medium.2-7) It has been known that the gelatinous precipitate transforms into α-FeO(OH) or α-Fe2O3 in an alkaline medium depending on the aging temperature and that the temperature at which the formation of α-Fe2O3 begins is governed by the aging conditions.2-4) It has also been known that the gelatinous precipitate in an acidic medium at room temperature forms β-FeO(OH) in the presence of Cl- ion5,6) or α-FeO(OH) with or without γ-FeO(OH) in the presence of ClO4- ion.6) It had also been reported that iron(III) basic sulfates, consisting of iron(III) sulfate and hydroxide, were formed in the

* 木山雅雄, 高田利夫: Laboratory of Solid State Chemistry, Institute for Chemical Research, Kyoto University, Kyoto 611.
presence of SO$_4^{2-}$ ion.\textsuperscript{7}

In order to clarify the mechanism of the formation of each product, more systematic experiments were necessary. In this paper, our experimental results for the transformation products, obtained at elevated temperatures between 50 and 90°C of the gelatinous precipitates in acidic or alkaline media containing sulfate, chloride or nitrate, will be reported.

**EXPERIMENTAL**

The starting suspensions of the gelatinous precipitates of iron(III) hydroxide were prepared by adding a NaOH solution to an acidic solution of one of iron(III) sulfate, chloride or nitrate (each of analytical grade). A number of suspensions, varying in the ratios of OH$^-$/Cl$^-$ or NO$_3^-$, or 2OH$^-$/SO$_4^{2-}$(R) and in the iron ion concentration, were prepared. A series of suspensions were also prepared using LiOH as a precipitant in place of NaOH.

Stirring the suspension by air bubbling was found to be extremely helpful in accelerating the speed of aging the gelatinous precipitate as compared with the conventional magnetic or mechanical stirring method. Each suspension was diluted with water to 3L* in a 4L flask equipped with five inlet necks for insertion of a temperature regulator, a thermometer, a reflux condenser, an electrode pH meter and an air introducing tube. The construction of the flask was elsewhere specified.\textsuperscript{8}

The suspension was rapidly heated to a desired temperature and then stirred by bubbling air into it at a constant rate of 200L/h for 50h. The air from which carbon oxides had been removed by washing with a KOH solution was used for stirring the suspension. During the aging the temperature of suspension was kept constant.

The aging products were filtered through filter paper, washed with water, treated with acetone, and then dried at 100°C. All powdery samples thus obtained were examined by the X ray powder diffraction method using Mn filtered FeKα radiation, some by the electronmicroscopic observation and magnetic measurement at room temperature using a magnetic torsion balance. The magnetic susceptibility, $\chi$, of all samples which had undergone the magnetic measurement did not exhibit any magnetic field dependence in the range 1 to 10kOe. The mean particle sizes of $\alpha$- or $\beta$-FeO(OH) existing with or without another substance in the samples were estimated from the half broadening of X ray diffraction peaks.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Processes of Transformation. Table I gives aging products and their physical properties when the suspensions with various R values, containing 0.07M**Fe$_6$(SO$_4$)$_3$ were subjected to aging at 50°C. As indicated in the table, the gelatinous precipitate, formed by mixing solutions of NaOH and Fe$_6$(SO$_4$)$_3$ at R=1, was chemically stable in a nearly neutral medium, the aging product being superparamagnetic. However, any gelatinous precipitate was very unstable in an acidic or alkaline medium and easily transformed

\* L=dm$^3$.
\** M=mol dm$^{-3}$
Hydrolysis of Iron (III) Hydroxide

Table I. Transformation Products of Gelatinous Precipitates in Suspension Media with Various R Values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>$\chi \cdot 10^{-6}$ (emu/g)</th>
<th>Particle sizes ($\AA$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$(110)$</td>
<td>$(130)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>2.1 → 1.9</td>
<td>a mixture*</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2.3 → 2.2</td>
<td>$\alpha$-FeO(OH)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>2.9 → 2.3</td>
<td>$\alpha$-FeO(OH)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>9.1 → 7.8</td>
<td>amorphous</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$\alpha$-FeO(OH)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $\alpha$-FeO(OH) and NaFe$_3$(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$.

into a crystalline precipitate by aging. It was found by X-ray analysis to consist of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) with or without another substance having the same crystal structure as that of NaFe$_3$(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$. The process of transformation in the alkaline medium could be visually observed to differ from that in the acidic media. In the course of transformation in the alkaline medium with $R=2$, 100 mL samples of the suspension were taken out after 0, 5, and 20 h. After filtration, each separated precipitate was washed with water, treated with acetone and dried at 50°C in air. Examinations of these three samples indicated that the initial brownish color gradually turned yellowish with aging, the $\chi$ value decreased to $66 \times 10^{-6}$ emu/g with an increase in the particle size perpendicular to the (110) plane of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) crystals to 500 A in 20 h of aging time. On the other hand, the gelatinous precipitates formed for $0.43 \leq R \leq 0.85$ dissolved completely into the acidic media with aging and before long, yellowish precipitates were gradually formed.

Such transformation processes in acidic or alkaline media could be observed, irrespective of the kind of iron(III) salt as thereinafter described.

**Transformation in Alkaline Media.** Three kinds of alkaline suspensions containing 0.08 M Fe$_2$(SO$_4$)$_3$ were prepared by mixing solutions of NaOH and Fe$_2$(SO$_4$)$_3$ with $R=1.2$, 2.0 and 3.0 and subjected to aging at 50 and 80°C. X-ray examination demonstrated that whereas the aging products obtained at 50 and 80°C from the suspensions with $R=3.0$ consist of an amorphous substance and $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ respectively, other products consist of $\alpha$-FeO(OH). These results indicate that increasing the concentration of excess NaOH causes a retardation in the velocity of transformation into a crystalline precipitate and a lowering of the temperature for the formation of $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$.

The temperature for $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ formation had been reported to depend on the pretreatment of the gelatinous precipitate before aging at high temperature. The same suspensions as mentioned above had been allowed to stay at room temperature for 50 h before they were aged at temperatures between 50 and 90°C. It was found that all gelatinous precipitates in alkaline medium ultimately transformed themselves into $\alpha$-FeO(OH) without forming $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$.

Similar experiments were conducted with iron nitrate and chloride in place of iron (III) sulfate. Transformation into $\alpha$-FeO(OH) or $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ took place, but no particular differences could be noted in the formation conditions for $\alpha$-FeO(OH) or $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ in alkaline media. Electronmicrographs of some products consisting of $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ and $\alpha$-FeO(OH) obtained from alkaline media are shown in Figs. 1 and 2.

When LiOH was used as a precipitant in place of NaOH, the gelatinous precipitate
M. Kiyama and T. Takada

Fig. 1. Electronmicrographs of $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ precipitates prepared by aging at 80°C of alkaline suspensions with $R=3$, containing 0.08M Fe$_2$(SO$_4$)$_3$(a), 0.17M FeCl$_3$(b) and 0.17M Fe(NO$_3$)$_3$(c). (b) and (c) were taken by the carbon replica method.

Fig. 2. Electronmicrographs of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) precipitates prepared by aging at 80°C of alkaline suspensions with $R=1.7$, containing 0.2M Fe(NO$_3$)$_3$(a) and 0.1M Fe$_2$(SO$_4$)$_3$(b and c). (c) had been allowed to stand at room temperature for 50h before aging at 80°C.

in an alkaline medium transformed into a brownish ferromagnetic precipitate even at such low temperature as 50°C, irrespective of the kind of iron(III) salt used. The ferromagnetic precipitate was found by X ray examination to consist of spinel ferrite particles (LiFe$_5$O$_8$).

**Transformation in Acidic Media.** Four kinds of acidic suspensions with $R=0.4$, 0.5, 0.75 and 0.9, each containing 0.14M Fe(NO$_3$)$_3$, were subjected to aging at 50°C. The dissolution as visually detected of the gelatinous precipitates was followed by the formation of yellowish precipitates in the acidic media with pH<2 for $R \leq 0.75$. The duration of aging required for the precipitate formation became longer with increasing $R$. For the acidic medium with $R=0.9$, no visible precipitate was formed even after 50h. The yellowish precipitates were found to have the values of $50 \times 10^{-6}$ emu/g in $\chi$ and to consist of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) particles, 50-60 Å in size for the [110] direction as a result of X ray examination.

Similar experiments were conducted using iron(III) chloride instead of iron(III) nitrate. But, precipitates formed at 0.14M FeCl$_3$ could not be isolated by filtration because of too fine particles. When acidic suspensions with $R=0.3$, 0.6, and 0.8, each
Hydrolysis of Iron (III) Hydroxide

Table II. Effect of Aging Temperature on \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) Formation in Acidic Suspension Media Containing Nitrates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temp. (°C)</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>( \chi \times 10^{-6} \text{emu/g} )</th>
<th>Particle size (Å)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.3 → 1.7</td>
<td>( \alpha-FeO(OH) )</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.3 → 1.5</td>
<td>a mixture*</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.3 → 1.2</td>
<td>a mixture*</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.1 → 1.2</td>
<td>( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 )</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) and \( \alpha-FeO(OH) \).

Table III. Aging Products Obtained from Acidic Media Containing Sulfates at Different Temperatures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temp. (°C)</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>Particle sizes (Å) (110) (130) (111)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.2 → 1.9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.2 → 1.6</td>
<td>60 40 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.2 → 1.4</td>
<td>80 50 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.0 → 1.3</td>
<td>80 50 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All products proved by X ray analysis to be a mixture of \( \alpha-FeO(OH) \) and \( \text{NaFe}_3(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})_6 \).

containing 0.6M \( \text{FeCl}_3 \), were aged at 50°C. The aging products were yellowish brown and found to have the \( \chi \) values \( 40 - 70 \times 10^{-6} \text{emu/g} \) and to consist of \( \beta-FeO(OH) \) particles, 40-50 Å in size for the [110] direction.

Acidic suspensions with \( R=0.5 \), each containing 0.16M \( \text{Fe(NO}_3)_3 \), were aged at several different temperatures. The experimental results are given in Table II. Reddish precipitates consisting of \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) or mixtures of \( \alpha-FeO(OH) \) and \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) were formed at 60°C or higher as tabulated. With an increase in temperature, the precipitate formation was accelerated and both the \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) content and particle size increased.

Similar experiments were also conducted using \( \text{FeCl}_3 \) in place of \( \text{Fe(NO}_3)_3 \). When acidic suspensions with \( R=0.5 \), each containing 0.25M \( \text{FeCl}_3 \), were aged at temperatures 60, 70, 80 and 90°C, yellowish brown precipitates could be obtained by aging at 80 and 90°C, consisting of \( \beta-FeO(OH) \) particles with 70 Å size for the [110] direction.

When acidic suspensions with \( R=0.4, 0.6 \) and 0.8, containing 0.34 and 0.7M \( \text{FeCl}_3 \), were subjected to aging at 90°C, yellowish brown precipitates consisting of \( \beta-FeO(OH) \) particles with 90-100 Å in size for the [110] and reddish brown precipitates consisting of mixtures of \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) and \( \beta-FeO(OH) \) were formed depending only on \( R \). The content of \( \alpha-Fe_2O_3 \) in the mixture increased with increasing \( R \).

Table III gives the experimental results obtained by subjecting acidic suspensions with \( R=0.4 \), each containing 0.08M \( \text{Fe}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3 \), to aging at different temperatures. All products were yellowish and found by X ray examination to be mixtures of \( \text{NaFe}_3(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})_6 \) and \( \alpha-FeO(OH) \). An increase in temperature resulted in an increase in the content of \( \text{NaFe}_3(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})_6 \) as a result of accelerated hydrolysis.

Similar experiments were carried out by use of \( \text{LiOH} \) in place of \( \text{NaOH} \) in the presence of \( \text{SO}_4^{2-} \). The yellowish brown products obtained consisted of \( \alpha-FeO(OH) \).
Note that under the present experimental conditions any basic iron(III) sulfate could not be detected by means of X-ray examination.

It had been reported in our paper that hydrolysis of iron(III) ions formed at 70°C by slow oxidation of iron(II) ions in a strongly acidic sulfate solution causes the formation of $\text{Fe}_4\text{SO}_4(\text{OH})_{16} = (\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3)_2\text{SO}_3(\text{H}_2\text{O})_5$ in the absence of $\text{Na}^+$, $\text{K}^+$, or $\text{NH}_4^+$ ion, whereas that of $(\text{Na}^+, \text{K}^+, \text{or} \text{NH}_4^+)$ Fe$_3$(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$ in the presence of $\text{Na}^+$, $\text{K}^+$, or $\text{NH}_4^+$ ion.

A paper reported that a precipitate of Fe$_3$(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$·2H$_2$O which is isomorphous with NaFe$_2$(SO$_4$)$_4$(OH)$_6$ can be formed by aging a strongly acidic solution at 80°C or higher, irrespective of the presence of $\text{Na}^+$, $\text{K}^+$, or $\text{NH}_4^+$ ion.

Several samples, found by X-ray and electronmicroscopic examinations to consist of a mixture of hexagonal or cubic particles of NaFe$_3$(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$, greater than 2-3 $\mu$m in size, and very fine needle-like particles of $\alpha$-FeO(OH), were chosen from the products prepared at 50 and 80°C in the range 0.35 ≤ $R$ ≤ 0.5. After the samples had been dissolved in a dilute HCl solution by heating the contents of $\text{Na}^+$ and SO$_4^{2-}$ ions were respectively determined by atomic absorption and gravimetric analysis. The results indicated that these samples contained $\text{Na}^+$ and SO$_4^{2-}$ ions in the $\text{Na}^+/\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ ratio of 0.5.

Electronmicrographs of the particles of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) and $\beta$-FeO(OH) (sometimes in

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![Electronmicrographs of precipitates consisting of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) particles(a), a mixture of $\alpha$-FeO(OH) and NaFe$_3$(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$ (b and c), $\beta$-FeO(OH) (d and e), and a mixture of $\beta$-FeO(OH) and $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$]
Hydrolysis of Iron (III) Hydroxide

the form of a mixture) obtained from the acidic media are given in Fig. 3. Both kinds of particles were very fine or irregularly large as compared with the particles of $\alpha$-, or $\beta$-FeO(OH) prepared by aging the alkaline suspensions (Fig. 2) or by hydrolysis through dilution or heating of iron(III) chloride solution. Since the needle-like particles of $\alpha$- or $\beta$-FeO(OH) have a pronounced elongation in the [001] direction of its crystal structure, the mean particle size estimated from X-ray diffraction examination is an approximate width-size. The large and irregular particles of $\alpha$- and $\beta$-FeO(OH) shown in Fig. 3 (except for the large hexagonal NaFe$_3$-(SO$_4$)$_2$(OH)$_6$ shown in (b) and the spherical $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ in (f)) each are considered to consist of very fine needle-like particles, less than 100 Å in width.

**Mechanism of Precipitation in Acidic Media.** Formation of a variety of products in the acidic media, as has been mentioned, is probably due to some differences in the composition and structure of the iron(III) ions present in the media prior to the precipitation. In our preceding paper, it was indicated that two kinds of polynuclear complexes consisting of a great number of [Fe$_6$(OH)$_2$]$^{4+}$ and [Fe$_8$(OH)$_3$]$^{4+}$ cations were formed in the presence of SO$_4^{2-}$ ions by hydrolysis of the iron(III) ions and that the concentration of each kind formed was dependent on the pH. The polynuclear complex can only exist in the acidic media and it consists of either [Fe$_6$(OH)$_2$]$^{4+}$ cations in the presence of NO$_3^-$ ions or [Fe$_8$(OH)$_3$]$^{4+}$ cations in the presence of Cl$^-$ ions.

From our experimental results, it can be inferred that the precipitation of each product in the acidic media takes place according to the formulas as follows: (where the H$_2$O ligands are abbreviated for simplicity)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Fe}_3(\text{OH})_2(\text{SO}_4)_{7/2} + \frac{1}{2}\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4 + 4\text{H}_2\text{O} & = \text{NaFe}_3(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})_6 + 2\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4 \\
\text{Fe}_5(\text{OH})_3(\text{SO}_4)_{5/2} & = \alpha\text{-FeO(OH)} + \frac{1}{2}\text{Fe}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3 + \text{H}_2\text{O} \\
\frac{3}{2}\text{Fe}_6(\text{OH})_2\text{OCl}_2 & = 2\beta\text{-FeO(OH)} + \text{FeCl}_3 + \frac{1}{2}\text{H}_2\text{O}
\end{align*}
\]

As mentioned previously, with a rise in temperature the formation of $\alpha$-Fe$_3$O$_5$ was accelerated. The formation in acidic media was found to be mainly governed by the kind of acid anion. $\alpha$-Fe$_3$O$_5$ began to be formed at 60°C in the presence of NO$_3^-$ ions and at 90°C in the presence of Cl$^-$ ions. Whichever precipitate, $\alpha$-Fe$_3$O$_5$ or FeO(OH), occurs in the same acidic medium due to the temperature difference may be attributed to the change in the structure of polynuclear complex as also discussed in our preceding paper.

The particles of $\alpha$-FeO(OH), $\alpha$-Fe$_5$O$_9$, and LiFe$_5$O$_8$ prepared in the alkaline suspensions were microscopically observed to have different shapes from each other. It is clear, therefore, that the formation of each precipitate takes place in the alkaline suspension medium. It would be difficult to clarify the mechanism for the precipitate formation in the alkaline suspension medium, impeded by the presence of precipitates.

The authors wish to thank Dr. T. Ichida and Mr. T. Asai for their help in conducting numerous experiments.
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