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Elham Tavakoli, Arvin Kakekhani, Shayan Kaviani, Peng Tan, Mahdi Mohammadi Ghaleni, Mohsen Asle Zaeem, Andrew M. Rappe, and Siamak Nejati

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1 2 3 4 5	In Situ Bottom-up Synthesis of Porphyrin-based Covalent Organic Frameworks
6 7 8	Elham Tavakoli ^{a*} Arvin Kakekhani ^{b*} Shavan Kaviani ^{e*} Peng Tan ^{b,d} Mahdi Mohammadi
9 10 11 12	Ghaleni ^c , Mohsen Asle Zaeem ^e , Andrew M. Rappe ^b , Siamak Nejati ^{a,c}
13 14 15	^a Department of Mechanical and Materials Engineering,
16 17 18	University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68588-8286, USA
19 20	^b Department of Chemistry, University of Pennsylvania,
21 22 23	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-6323, USA
24 25	^c Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering,
26 27 28	University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68588-8286, USA
29 30	^d Department of Physics, Harbin Institute of Technology,
31 32 33	Harbin 150001, China
34 35 36	^e Department of Mechanical Engineering, Colorado School of Mines,
37 38	Golden, CO 80401-1887, USA
39 40 41	* Contributed equally
42 43	KEYWORDS: covalent organic frameworks, porphyrin, Pyridine, Co-crystallization, crystalline
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48 49	ABSTRACT: Synthesis and processing of two- or three-dimensional covalent organic framewor

ABSTRACT: Synthesis and processing of two- or three-dimensional covalent organic frameworks (COFs) have been limited by solvent intractability and sluggish condensation kinetics. Here, we report on the electrochemical deposition of poly(5,10,15,20-tetrakis (4-aminophenyl) porphyrin)-covalent organic frameworks (POR-COFs) via formation of phenazine linkages. By adjusting the synthetic parameters, we demonstrate the bottom-up synthesis of COF dendrites. Both experiment and density functional theory

(DFT) underline the prominent role of pyridine, not only as a polymerization promoter, but as a stabilizing sublattice, co-crystallizing with the framework. The crucial role of pyridine in dictating the structural properties of such a co-crystal (Py-POR-COF) is discussed. Also, a structure-to-function relationship for this class of materials, governing their electrocatalytic activity for the oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) in alkaline media, is reported.

Covalent organic frameworks (COFs) represent organized and intrinsically porous networks constructed using a variety of rigid organic units.¹ Among various building blocks of COFs, macrocyclic structures such as phthalocyanine and porphyrin are of special interest due to their metal coordination chemistry.²⁻⁵ Having delocalized π -electrons and high surface area, the porphyrin-based COFs (POR-COFs) have found applications in optoelectronics, molecular electronics, separation, and catalysis.⁶⁻¹⁰ Despite the promise of POR-COFs in electrocatalysis, especially in carbon dioxide and oxygen electroreduction, their processing is hindered by their low solubilities.¹¹⁻¹² The electroreduction of oxygen on porphyrinic structures is of special interest, as the respiratory enzymes with similar active centers catalyze this reaction in-vivo, with an unsurpassed selectivity.¹³ Development of porphyrin-based ORR catalysts has thus been an active research field,^{12, 14-16} achieving electrocatalytic activities comparable to those of Pt-based catalysts.¹⁷⁻¹⁸ Here, we demonstrate a novel approach for assembling POR-COFs via in-situ electrocrystallization of 5,10,15,20-tetrakis(4-aminophenyl)porphyrin known as TAPP. We discuss the importance of stacking the 2D-COF sheets and intercalated guest molecules¹⁹ in determining the structure and subsequently the electrocatalytic activity of such frameworks.

We use a three-electrode electrochemical cell connected to a potentiostat for the electrodeposition of TAPP. The electropolymerization is performed through galvanostatic, potentiostatic, and potentiodynamic methods in a solution of TAPP monomer in dichloromethane, containing supporting electrolyte salt and pyridine; a Ag/AgNO₃ electrode and a platinum gauze are used as the reference and counter electrodes, respectively. The polymerization proceeds via formation of radical cations of TAPP, followed by a series of coupling reactions of the oxidized para-aminophenyl substituents. Initially, diphenylamines form, and subsequently they convert to dihydrophenazines and phenazine linkages (see Section 2.3 of the Supporting Information).^{16, 20}

Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), and X-ray diffraction (XRD), shown in Figures S2-4, were performed to characterize the electrodeposited materials. As shown in Figure 1a, atomic force microscope infrared spectroscopy (AFM-IR) reveals that the deposited films on the glassy carbon (GC) electrode possess dendritic structures and are organic. The deposited films remain stable upon lifting and transfer to a polar aprotic solvent such as acetonitrile (see Figures S5 and S6). The IR spectra of the dendrites (see Figure 1b) agree with the FTIR spectra of the

free-standing polymeric film of TAPP (pTAPP), synthesized after Walter et al.²⁰ As shown in Figures 1b and S2, the characteristic peaks of pTAPP appeared between 1000-1100 cm⁻¹ and 1660-1630 cm⁻¹. We assigned the former to the C-H deformations of the phenyl rings, beta-pyrrolic, and phenazine ring, and the latter to the C=C and C=N of phenazine ring vibrations.²¹⁻²² XPS reveals that the films are organic, and a small content of fluorine in the samples was assigned to the residual hexafluorophosphate (PF_{6}) anion (section 3.2 of Supporting Information). The X-ray diffractograms for the pTAPP dendrites, deposited on gold and GC electrodes, are shown in Figures 2a and 4S, respectively. The diffraction patterns demonstrate a distinct peak at 15.8 degrees. This peak is the fingerprint of crystalline pTAPP. corresponding to an interlayer distance of 5.60 Å for the stacked 2D-COF sheets. However, such spacing is unexpectedly large for COFs.²³⁻²⁵ Our DFT calculations reveal that the pyridine molecules can intercalate within the pTAPP network and increase the interlayer spacing between the 2D sheets (see Figure 2a). Our calculations suggest that the experimental samples possess a (6:1) ratio of pyridine to TAPP (Figure 2b). Such a structure is polymorphous; for example, for each TAPP molecule, zero, one or two out of the six pyridine molecules (denoted by 6Py-0, 6Py-1 and 6Py-2, respectively), can be located between the stacked porphyrin rings. These configurations are close in energy (within 2 meV per atom) and can be thermally explored. The simulated XRD patterns for a few such structures are shown in Figure 2a. A common feature among these patterns is the peak appearing around 15.8 degrees.



Figure 1. (a) AFM height image of pTAPP, electrodeposited on GC electrode. (b) FT-IR spectra of a spot (the blue circle in (a)) on the dendrite. The electropolymerization was carried out in a 5% v/v pyridine in dichloromethane solution containing 0.25 mM TAPP and 0.05 M TEA(PF_6) as the supporting electrolyte salt.



Figure 2. (a) Experimental XRD pattern of Py-POR-COF electropolymerized on a gold substrate, along with the DFT-predicted XRD patterns for a few heterostructures with 6 pyridines per pTAPP unit. The electropolymerization of TAPP was carried out in a solution containing 0.25 mM TAPP and 0.05 M TEA(PF₆) as the supporting electrolyte salt, and 5% v/v pyridine in dichloromethane. (b) The DFT-derived structure for the lowest internal-energy structure with 6 pyridines (6Py-2). The color code for COF is: C (black), N (blue) and H (white). For pyridine: C (gray), N (cyan), and H (magenta). The a, b and c axes are the cell lattice vectors.

Here, the non-planar geometry of TAPP (see Figure S16) forces the resulting POR-COF structure into an inclined (J-aggregate) stacking, allowing accommodation of the maximal π - π stacking between the layers.^{23, 26} Additionally, the pyridine additive not only neutralizes protonated amine groups and increases the polymerization efficiency,²⁰ but also stabilizes the overall heterostructure and improves the crystallinity through co-electrocrystallization with the pTAPP. This phenomenon is presented in Figure 3d, where the intercalated pyridine is shown to stabilize the internal energy of the whole system. The structure with four pyridines (per TAPP) is a thermodynamic sink, when the internal energy contribution alone is considered. Comparing Young's moduli of structures with four and six pyridines (4- and 6-Py), shown in Figure 3e, we find that the latter is considerably softer. This softness and the excess free volume of the 6-Py structures lead to increased entropy and lower Gibbs free energy for the system. Therefore, we expect entropy stabilization to play a role in experimental realization of the 6-Py phase (for more details see Section 4 of the Supporting Information). By examining Figures 3a-c and Figure 2b, we note that increasing the pyridine content enhances the tilting of the J-aggregate stacking. This phenomenon is concomitant with an increase in the estimated interlayer distance. Nonetheless, the average values for the peak position in the simulated XRD, shown in Figure 2a, are slightly higher when compared with the position of the peak in the experimental result. We attribute this discrepancy to the out-of-plane thermal

expansion of the structure, not accounted for in DFT models. For details on the elastic moduli and other

DFT calculations, see Section 4 of the Supporting Information.



Figure 3. The DFT-derived structures for Py-POR-COF with 0 (a), 1 (b) and 4 (c) intercalated pyridines. The color code for the atoms is the same as in the previous figure. (d) Binding energy (BE) of pyridine (Py) in Py-POR-COF computed relative to the bare stacked COF and bulk pyridine phase. (e) Young's modulus for some relevant material phases.

In order to understand the parameters influencing the morphology of pTAPP, we performed a set of electropolymerization experiments. Figure 4a demonstrates the morphological changes of pTAPP as a function of temperature and potential scanning rate. The statistical analyses of the SEM images (Figure S8) suggest that the dendrite size increases at lower temperatures or higher scan rates. It has been previously proposed that dendrite growth during electropolymerization is governed by the linear and spherical diffusion of the active species to the electrode surface.²⁷⁻²⁹ Here, we assume that the dendrite growth starts with the initial coverage of the substrate by pTAPP nanowire networks.¹⁷ Soon after the dendrite nucleation takes place, due to the spherical diffusion on the nuclei and protrusions (Figure 4d), pTAPP crystals grow from the edges of {110} planes.³⁰ The impact of the diffusion boundary layer on the electropolymerization of TAPP and the formation of dendrites are discussed in Section 3.6 of the Supporting Information. To elucidate the effect of substrate on the electropolymerization of TAPP, we performed experiments on substrates with various surface energies and roughness factors. As shown in Figures S11-15, a smoother surface favors formation of larger dendrites by providing fewer possible nucleation sites; therefore, greater distances may exist between nuclei, permitting growth of larger dendrites.



Figure 4. (a) SEM images of pTAPP films, electrodeposited with scan rates of 2 mV/s, 10 mV/s, and 50 mV/s at temperatures of 5 °C, 25 °C, and 35 °C on GC (scale bar is 50 μ m). (b) Dendrite angle of the pTAPP electrodeposited with a scan rate of 2 mV/s at 5 °C. (c) SEM image of the pTAPP dendrite supported on an amorphous pTAPP, deposited on GC electrode at 2 mV/s and 5 °C. The scale bar in the inset is 300 nm. (d) The schematic mechanism of dendrite formation during the electropolymerization of pTAPP. Electropolymerization is carried out in a 5% v/v pyridine in dichloromethane solution containing 0.25 mM TAPP and 0.05 M TEA(PF₆).

We evaluate the ORR electrocatalytic performance of the Py-POR-COF films, deposited on GC electrodes, using a three-electrode electrochemical cell, in an aqueous phosphate buffer solution (PBS). The experimental procedure is reported in Section 5 of the Supporting Information. Figure 5a presents the cyclic voltammograms of the prepared films in the electrolyte solutions. For the electrolyte saturated with oxygen, a salient cathodic peak is observed at ≈ 0.54 V versus reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE). We attribute this peak to the oxygen electroreduction on the deposited frameworks.

We performed rotating disk experiments on the coated electrodes and used the Koutecky-Levich (K-L) equation to obtain the electron transfer number (*n*). The estimated values for *n* were found to be 3.21 ± 0.51 and 3.97 ± 0.44 , for the wire- and dendrite-like samples, respectively. These values suggest that the ORR is taking place via mixed two- and four-electron pathways (Figure S21).³¹ The larger *n* for the Py-POR-COF, compared to the wire-like pTAPP, points to the superior electrocatalytic activity of Py-POR-COF. Changing the potential scanning rate used for electrodeposition, we observed a change in the onset potential of the cathodic waves and the normalized ORR current density (Figure S22). As mentioned earlier, morphology of the electropolymerized Py-POR-COF is also correlated with the scan rate. Comparing these morphologies (Figure 4a) to the voltammograms in Figure 5b and S22 reveals that the

films with larger crystalline dendrites display higher ORR activity. We expect that such enhanced electrocatalytic activity is correlated with a better crystal quality, i.e., lower density of structural defects and a more ordered arrangement of the Py-POR-COFs, leading to better charge mobility (relative to the amorphous structures).^{17, 32-35} In addition to temperature, scan rate and electrode material, the stabilizing effect of pyridine is yet another factor contributing to the ordered networks of (pyridine-mediated) π - π stacked COFs (Figure S23). For more details on the enhancement of charge mobility and ORR, see Section S5 of the Supporting Information.

The pyridine co-crystallization leads to an increased interlayer distance. Hence, in addition to the surface binding sites, the enlarged spacing allows the oxygen species to explore the 3D binding motifs, created by the stacked COF layers. Such motifs (and the resulting confinement) can potentially change the energetics of the ORR intermediates, break some scaling relations and improve the current density.³⁶⁻³⁹ Additionally, the stacking pattern, by changing the interlayer vdW and π - π interactions, can change the energetics of different reaction intermediates, and, consequently, the overall catalytic activity. The important role of vdW interactions in tuning the catalytic activity of 2D materials has been previously reported.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹



Figure 5. The electrocatalytic activity of Py-POR-COF in ORR. (a) The cyclic voltammogram of a Py-POR-COF in a phosphate buffer solution (PBS) (pH=13) deaerated with argon (Ar) and saturated with oxygen (O₂). The film was deposited at 25 °C and a scan rate of 50 mV/s. (b) The normalized cyclic voltammogram of Py-POR-COF films in an O₂-saturated PBS with (pH=13), presenting a correlation between Py-POR-COF crystallinity and the ORR catalytic performance. The potential scanning rate for ORR was set at 20 mV/s. The scale bars on the SEM image are 60 µm. Here, (i), (ii) and (iii) represent the respective structure of the samples prepared at a deposition temperature of 25 °C.

In summary, we reported the in situ electropolymerization of porphyrin derivatives (TAPP) and the formation of crystalline domains (Py-POR-COF). We investigated the parameters influencing the

electropolymerization of TAPP and developed a methodology to control the growth and deposition of COFs. We demonstrated that the highly-ordered 3D stacking of the Py-POR-COFs enhances the ORR activity of the sample. High crystalline order is achieved by controlling the temperature, potential scanning rate, electrode materials, and through co-crystallization with pyridine. The pyridine sublattice not only stabilizes the Py-POR-COF superlattice, but it also controls the interlayer spacing and stacking in this class of materials.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI:

General procedures, experimental details of synthesis, electrochemistry studies, and DFT calculations. Characterizations, containing FT-IR, ¹H-NMR spectra, XRD data and crystal structures, SEM images, AFM images, and stability test. Additionally, the DFT-derived .cif files which contain the structural information of the systems discussed in this paper are available online for readers interested in the crystallographic aspects of our systems.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Author

*snejati2@unl.edu

ORCID

Elham Tavakoli: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2077-0577

Arvin Kakekhani: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8553-7776

- Shayan Kaviani: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9868-7757
- Mahdi Mohammadi Ghaleni: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9824-450X
- Mohsen Asle Zaeem: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5164-6122
- Andrew M. Rappe: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4620-6496
- Siamak Nejati: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1807-2796

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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