CeO$_2$ nanoparticles synthesized by a microwave-assisted hydrothermal method: evolution from nanospheres to nanorods
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Ceria (CeO$_2$) plays a vital role in emerging technologies for environmental and energy-related applications. The catalytic efficiency of ceria nanoparticles depends on its morphology. In this study, CeO$_2$ nanoparticles were synthesized by a microwave-assisted hydrothermal method under different synthesis temperatures. The samples were characterized by X-ray diffraction, transmission electron microscopy, Raman scattering spectroscopy, electron paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy and by the Brunauer–Emmett–Teller method. The X-ray diffraction and Raman scattering results indicated that all the synthesized samples had a pure cubic CeO$_2$ structure. Rietveld analysis and Raman scattering also revealed the presence of structural defects due to an associated reduction in the valence of the Ce$^{4+}$ ions to Ce$^{3+}$ ions caused by an increasing molar fraction of oxygen vacancies. The morphology of the samples was controlled by varying the synthesis temperature. The TEM images show that samples synthesized at 80 °C consisted of spherical particles of about 5 nm, while those synthesized at 120 °C presented a mix of spherical and rod-like nanoparticles and the sample synthesized at 160 °C consisted of nanorods with 10 nm average diameter and 70 nm length. The microwave-assisted method proved to be highly efficient for the synthesis of CeO$_2$ nanoparticles with different morphologies.

Introduction

Ceria (CeO$_2$) nanostructures have attracted the interest of many researchers in the past decade due to their great potential for applications in catalysis, electrochromic devices, gas sensors, ultraviolet ray detectors, environmentally friendly pigments, gamma radiation dosimetry, etc. CeO$_2$ is a chemically stable oxide, with an outstanding capacity to store or release oxygen due to the variation of the oxidation state of cerium between +3 and +4, under various reductive or oxidizing conditions. For example, the catalytic activity of oxides is linked to their capability of providing adsorbent oxygen species at their surfaces and an easy extraction of their lattice oxygen forming oxygen vacancies.

The technological applications of nanostructured materials are strongly related to their crystalline structure, crystal size and morphology. For CeO$_2$ nanostructures, Tana et al. reported higher catalytic activity for CO oxidation and oxygen storage capacity of CeO$_2$ nanowires than nanorods and nanoparticles. Si and Flytzani-Stephanopoulos observed a strong shape/crystal plane effect of CeO$_2$ on the gold–ceria activity for the WGS reaction. They have reported that the rod-like ceria enclosed by {110} planes is most active for gold stabilization/activation. Li et al. verified that CeO$_2$ nanowires could be used in dosimetry for low radiation dose, since nanowire dosimetry possessed high sensitivity while retaining cost-effectiveness as the conventional chemical dosimeters. CeO$_2$ nanorod arrays were successfully grown on Ti substrates by an electrochemical assembly process which exhibited photovoltaic response under visible light illumination, creating the opportunity to build various photovoltaic devices.

According to these authors, different manufacturing processes have been developed to obtain CeO$_2$ nanostructures with different morphologies, e.g., hydrothermal and solvothermal, micro-wave-assisted hydrothermal, microemulsion, impregnation, co-precipitation, urea–nitrate combustion, sol–gel and metal–organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD) methods. Among these methods, hydrothermal treatments appear to be potentially interesting in terms of morphological variations. Guan et al. reported a systematic study of ceria materials with different morphologies such as sphere, rods, and prisms via the hydrolysis of solutions containing Ce(NO$_3$)$_3$ and urea under hydrothermal conditions. According to these authors, different
morphologies were obtained by carefully adjusting the synthesis conditions such as salt concentration, temperature and synthesis time. As an improvement of the method, the microwave-assisted route has the advantage of shorter reaction times, production of small particles with a narrow size distribution and high purity.\textsuperscript{14} According to Godinho et al.\textsuperscript{15} microwave irradiation increases the effective collision rate, reducing the time required to obtain anisotropically grown nanostructures.\textsuperscript{14}

Based on these trends, the aim of the work described here is to verify the effect of intrinsic parameters that can be controlled during microwave-assisted hydrothermal synthesis, such as temperature and time, on the evolution of CeO\textsubscript{2} nanostructures. We also demonstrate that the morphology of the CeO\textsubscript{2} anisotropic nanostructure is governed by the oriented attachment (OA) growth mechanism.

## Experimental

In a typical procedure to obtain CeO\textsubscript{2} nanostructures, 0.02 mol of cerium nitrate (Ce(NO\textsubscript{3})\textsubscript{3}-6H\textsubscript{2}O) was dissolved in 50 mL of distilled water. Then, 50 mL of a 5 M NaOH solution was added rapidly under vigorous stirring. The mixed solution was placed in a 110 mL Teflon autoclave reaching 90\% of its volume, which was sealed and placed in a microwave hydrothermal system, applying 2.45 GHz of microwave radiation at a maximum power of 800 W. The as-prepared solution was subjected to the microwave hydrothermal synthesis temperatures of 80, 120 and 160 °C for 16 min at a heating rate of 30 °C·min\textsuperscript{-1} and then air-cooled at room temperature. The as-obtained precipitate powder was washed several times with distilled water and isopropyl alcohol and then dried at 60 °C for 24 h.

The powders were characterized structurally in an X-ray diffractometer (Rigaku, Rotaflex RU200B) with CuK\textalpha radiation (50 kV, 100 mA, \( \lambda = 1.5405 \) Å), using a \( \theta - 2\theta \) configuration and a graphite monochromator. The scanning range was between 20 and 90° (20), with a step size of 0.02° and a step time of 5.0 s. A Rietveld analysis was performed using the Rietveld refinement program GSAS.\textsuperscript{16} A pseudo-Voigt profile function was used. The specific surface area was estimated from the N\textsubscript{2} adsorption/desorption isotherms at liquid nitrogen temperature, using a Micromeritics ASAP 2000 particle size analyzer and applying the Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (BET) method. The size and morphology of the samples were determined by transmission electron microscopy (TEM) using a JEOL JEM 2010 URP, operating at 200 keV. Raman spectroscopy was carried out at room temperature in a Jobin-Yvon-64000 micro-Raman system operating at 200 keV. Raman spectroscopy was carried out at 200 keV. Raman spectra were recorded at 20 K in an X-band Bruker ELEXSYS E580 spectrometer. The temperature was controlled by an Oxford ITC503 cryogenic system. The spectra were obtained at a modulation frequency of 100 kHz, a modulation amplitude of 0.2 mT and a microwave power of 1 mW.

### Results and discussion

Fig. 1 shows the XRD patterns of the CeO\textsubscript{2} samples obtained. Fluorite type CeO\textsubscript{2} (ICSD no. 156250) was present in all the samples. No secondary phase peaks were found in the samples. Table 1 describes the lattice parameter \( a \) calculated from the Rietveld refinement. The samples synthesized by the microwave-assisted method presented a higher \( a \) value than the bulk CeO\textsubscript{2} (5.4116(1) \( \AA \), ICSD no. 156250). The increasing lattice constant (strain relative to the bulk) for successively smaller particles in CeO\textsubscript{2} is explained in terms of an associated reduction in the vanence of the Ce\textsuperscript{4+} ions to Ce\textsuperscript{3+} ions caused by an increasing molar fraction of oxygen vacancies.\textsuperscript{35} Fig. 2 presents the EPR spectra of the samples. Pure CeO\textsubscript{2} revealed the formation of one type of paramagnetic species, A, due to Ce\textsuperscript{3+} (centered around 3445 G).\textsuperscript{36} This result corroborates the assumption of the presence of Ce\textsuperscript{3+} ions and oxygen vacancies in the samples.\textsuperscript{38}

In heterogeneous catalysis, it is well known that the catalytic activity of a supported metal increases with increasing surface area.\textsuperscript{37} Table 1 also presents the BET specific surface area for the samples. Materials with a high surface area of up to 144 m\textsuperscript{2}·g\textsuperscript{-1} were obtained. A linear decrease in the specific surface area of the samples with increasing synthesis temperature is observed, indicating an increase in particle size for higher synthesis temperatures.

Fig. 3 shows Raman spectra of the samples, complementing the structural characterization. Dioxides with a fluorite structure have only one allowed Raman mode, which has an F\textsubscript{2g} symmetry and can be viewed as a symmetric breathing mode of the O atoms around each cation.\textsuperscript{38} In bulk CeO\textsubscript{2} this frequency is 465 cm\textsuperscript{-1}. We observed two main features centered at 456 and 600 cm\textsuperscript{-1}.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthesis temperature/°C</th>
<th>( S_{\text{BET}}/\text{m}^2\cdot\text{g}^{-1} )</th>
<th>( a/\text{Å} )</th>
<th>( \Delta\omega_{\text{sep}}/\text{cm}^{-1} )</th>
<th>( \Delta\omega/\text{cm}^{-1} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>5.435(9)</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>5.442(4)</td>
<td>-10.4</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5.440(9)</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \omega \) Calculated via Rietveld refinement. \( \Delta \) Calculated according to ref. 38.
The former is assigned to the fluorite $F_{2g}$ mode, confirming the XRD results. The broad band around 600 cm\(^{-1}\) can be ascribed to oxygen vacancies and defects caused by small size effects.\(^{38}\)

The samples presented a shift of the $F_{2g}$ mode to lower frequencies than those of the bulk (inset of Fig. 3 and also presented in Table 1). According to Spanier et al.,\(^{35}\) several factors can contribute to the changes in the Raman peak position and linewidth of the 465 cm\(^{-1}\) peak, including phonon confinement, strain, broadening associated with size distribution, defects, and variations in phonon relaxation as a function of particle size. Considering the change in lattice constant, the frequency shift $\Delta u$ of the Raman mode produced by a change in lattice constant $\Delta a$ can be written in terms of the Grüneisen parameter as $\Delta u = -3\gamma_0\Delta a/\alpha_0$, where $\omega_0$ is the Raman frequency in pure CeO\(_2\), $\alpha_0$ is the CeO\(_2\) lattice constant, and $\gamma$ is the Grüneisen constant.\(^{38}\) This frequency shift was calculated with $\omega_0 = 465$ cm\(^{-1}\), $\alpha_0 = 0.54116(1)$ nm and $\gamma = 1.24$.\(^{39,40}\) These theoretical results are presented in Table 1 and are in good agreement with the experimental values.

Fig. 4 presents HRTEM and TEM images of the CeO\(_2\) nanoparticles. The HRTEM image in Fig. 4a indicates that the samples synthesized at 80 °C are composed mainly of nanospheres (indicated by black arrows) with an average size of 5 nm. From an analysis of the expanded HRTEM image, inset in Fig. 4a, one can see that the distance between neighboring planes is about 0.32 nm, related to the (111) crystallographic plane of cubic CeO\(_2\). The presence of the (111) crystallographic plane of cubic CeO\(_2\) confirms that the nanospheres are CeO\(_2\) related structures. Some anisotropic nanostructures with a poor morphology (indicated by black arrows) are also visible in these samples, as shown in Fig. 4b. The TEM image of the sample synthesized at 120 °C, Fig. 4c, reveals a mixture of morphologies composed mainly of nanorods with some nanospheres, with diameters around 5 and 7 nm, respectively. Since the sizes of the sample prepared at 80 °C (mainly nanospheres) are quite similar, this result shows that the increase of the synthesis temperature from 80 to 120 °C is mainly implicated in morphological changes than in regular crystal growth, as shown in Fig. 4. The samples synthesized at 160 °C, Fig. 4d, showed the presence of nanorods with an average diameter of 10 nm and a length of 70 nm; a few nanospheres were also observed.

From the images in Fig. 4 one can infer that the anisotropic nanostructures with a poor morphology (Fig. 4b) evolve to well-defined nanorods as the temperature of synthesis increases. The Ostwald Ripening (OR) model, which is a dissolution–reprecipitation growth mechanism, cannot be considered the only growth mechanism of those structures, since the extensive presence of line defects would not be expected in this case.\(^{39-44}\) One has to consider the oriented attachment (OA) mechanism, which has been proved effective in tailoring anisotropic particles.\(^{39,42-46}\) In fact, the mechanism was previously observed for CeO\(_2\). Cao et al.\(^{13}\) showed that the increase in size and changes in the morphology of CeO\(_2\) nanostructures prepared by the microwave-assisted hydrothermal method could be described by the Ostwald ripening coupled self-assembly process.

Fig. 5 presents HRTEM images of the entire set of samples. Fig. 5a and b indicate that the anisotropic nanostructures are composed of oriented primary spherical nanoparticles. In the
Fig. 5 HRTEM images of the as-obtained samples synthesized at: (a) 80 °C; (b and c) at 120 °C; and (d) 160 °C. The insets show crystallographic planes and directions (a and d), and neck formation (b). White arrows indicate the plane direction.

From our experimental results it is clear that the synthesis temperature plays an important role in obtaining well-defined anisotropic CeO₂ nanostructures under microwave-assisted hydrothermal conditions. Lee et al. ⁴⁹ showed that the increase of synthesis temperature plays an important role in increasing the degree of coalescence in the OA mechanism, which may be related to increased nanoparticle mobility, and hence, collision frequency. This explains the anisotropic structures with a poor morphology observed at the lowest synthesis temperature (80 °C), while the samples processed at 160 °C showed well defined nanorods. It should be noted that, although the OA mechanism is attributed as the main factor of anisotropic formation, a certain degree of diffusional motion can occur in higher temperatures, leading to the OR mechanism as concomitant to OA. In fact, both mechanisms may occur, but the OR mechanism is an equilibrium condition which is expected to be attained at longer times, smoothing the surface of the pre-formed rods. ⁴⁹

Conclusion

The microwave-assisted hydrothermal method proved to be efficient in the synthesis of CeO₂ nanoparticles with different morphologies. Control of the morphology was achieved by varying the synthesis temperature. Nanospheres evolved to nanorods with increasing synthesis temperature. The presence of structural defects was detected by Rietveld analysis and optical characterization and was attributed to an associated reduction in the valence of Ce³⁺ ions to Ce⁴⁺ ions caused by the increasing molar fraction of oxygen vacancies.

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References
