Solution and Solid-State Structural Chemistry of Th(IV) and U(IV) 4-Hydroxybenzoates

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ABSTRACT

Organic ligands with carboxylate functionalities have been shown to affect the solubility, speciation, and overall chemical behavior of tetravalent metal ions. While many reports have focused on actinide complexation by relatively simple monocarboxylates such as amino acids, in this work we examined Th(IV) and U(IV) complexation by 4-hydroxybenzoic acid in water

towards understanding the impact that the organic backbone has on the solution and solid state structural chemistry of thorium(IV) and uranium(IV) complexes. Two compounds of the general formula $[An_6O_4(OH)_4(H_2O)_6(4\text{-}HB)_{12}]\bullet nH_2O$ (An = Th (**Th-1**) and U (**U-1**), 4-HB = 4-hydroxybenzoate) were synthesized from room temperature reactions of $AnCl_4$ and 4-hydroxybenzoic acid in water. Solid-state structures were determined by single crystal X-ray diffraction and the compounds were further characterized by Raman, IR, and optical spectroscopies, and thermogravimetry. The magnetism of **U-1** was also examined. The structures of the Th- and U- compounds are isomorphous and are built from ligand decorated oxo/hydroxo bridged hexanuclear units. The relationship between the building units observed in the solid state structure of **U-1** and those that exist in solution prior to crystallization as well as upon dissolution of **U-1** in nonaqueous solvents was investigated using small angle X-ray scattering, UV-vis optical spectroscopy, and dynamic light scattering. The evolution of U solution speciation as a function of reaction time and temperature were examined. Such effects as well as the impact of the ligand on the formation and evolution of hexanuclear U(IV) clusters to UO_2 nanoparticles compared to prior reported monocarboxylate ligand systems is discussed. Unlike prior reported synthesis of Th and U(IV) hexamers where pH is adjusted to ~2 and 3 respectively to drive hydrolysis, hexamer formation with the HB ligand appears to be promoted only by the ligand.

INTRODUCTION

Actinide carboxylates have been intensely investigated over the past few decades due to their relevance to a number of processes including separations chemistries, waste management, and the environmental behavior of radionuclides.[1] Such work is motivated by a general recognition that the composition, charge, and nuclearity of the species that form and persist in solution or

otherwise precipitate into a solid phase have a significant impact on the overall chemical behavior of the actinides. In looking towards the solid state, arguably the most well examined actinide is uranium in its hexavalent oxidation state;[2-4] however, recent work showing the unexpected mobility of tetravalent actinides in environmental systems as well the significance of polynuclear complexes in separations and waste management has fueled efforts investigating the solution and solid state structural chemistry of tetravalent actinide metal ions.[1, 5-11]

As compared to the hexavalent actinides, which almost invariably form the well-known actinyl cation (AnO_2^{2+}) under aqueous conditions, the tetravalent actinides adopt more spherical or isotropic coordination geometries, thereby leading to structural units that not surprisingly are quite distinct from those of the hexavalent metal ions.[4, 12, 13] Moreover, due to their high Lewis acidity, the tetravalent actinides have an increased propensity to hydrolyze and condense to form oligomeric species that further complicate their behavior. Such reactions are governed by the acidity of the metal, its concentration, and solution conditions including pH, ionic strength, and temperature.[14, 15] It has also been shown that within these systems, the ligands play a critical role either competing with hydrolysis and condensation or otherwise directing the formation of soluble species.[16-17]

Within tetravalent actinide – organic carboxylate ligand systems a number of structural units have been reported in the solid state. These range in nuclearity from mononuclear complexes to polynuclear species that include di-, tri-, tetra-, hexa-, deca-, dodeca-, hexadeca-, and octatriaconta- nuclear oligomers.[4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 17-27] Of these species, the hexanuclear units have been observed most frequently, having been prepared across a range of ligand systems and reaction conditions.[12, 28] Solution based techniques including extended X-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS), small angle X-ray scattering (SAXS), and high energy X-ray scattering

(HEXS) have established the presence of the hexamer in solution; however, interestingly for thorium-glycine aqueous systems, wherein solution speciation was elucidated using HEXS, it was found that the assembly of the hexanuclear entity occurred only after the addition of glycine to a solution of dimeric species, suggesting that both the dimeric species as well as the carboxylate were necessary for assembly of the hexanuclear unit.[16] This work further suggested that the carboxylate played a directing role in the formation of the hexanuclear units.

Inspired by these results, our group is interested in understanding the role that complexing ligands have on templating the self-assembly of An(IV) structural units as well as the effects that the identity of the organic may have on the reactivity of these structural units as a function of solution conditions. In this work we examined the self-assembly of Th(IV) and U(IV) species in the presence of 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (4-HBA) in aqueous solution. This ligand was chosen for several reasons: (1) it allows us to examine the role that a bulkier, monocarboxylate ligand has on Th(IV) and U(IV) complex formation and reactivity; (2) its pKa (4.54) is not overly basic such that it would promote the formation of amorphous hydroxides; and (3) it may provide facile crystallization of the solution complexes due to its relatively limited solubility and potential to form supramolecular networks arising from hydrogen bonding and π-π stacking interactions. From these studies, we obtained $[An_6O_4(OH)_4(H_2O)_6(4\text{-}HB)_{12}]\bullet nH_2O$ (An = Th (**Th-1**) and U (**U-1**), 4-HB = 4-hydroxybenzoate), both at pH<1.5 without added base. To correlate the U(IV) building units observed in the solid state with those in solution prior to precipitation, we employed small angle X-ray scattering (SAXS) and optical absorption spectroscopy. The stability of the cluster cores upon dissolution and the reactivity of the clusters as a function of temperature were also examined to further expand the limited knowledge of

transformation of discrete molecular clusters to nanoparticles.[8] The magnetic and thermal behavior of **U-1** is also presented.

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

Materials. $ThCl_4$ (International Bio-analytical Industries, Inc) and 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (99%, Aldrich) were used as received and UCl_4 was synthesized following published literature procedures.[29] Details of the UCl_4 synthesis are provided as Supporting Information. Nanopure water (≤0.05 μS; Millipore USA) was used in all reactions. To prevent oxidation of U(IV), we employed nanopure water that was boiled and degassed, in addition to the use of a nitrogen filled glove box for all synthetic manipulations.

Synthesis. *Caution: ^{232}Th and ^{238}U are alpha-emitting radionuclides and standard precautions for handling radioactive materials should be followed when working with the quantities used in the syntheses that follow.*

Th-1, $Th_6O_4(OH)_4(4\text{-}HB)_{12}(H_2O)_6 \cdot 12(H_2O)$, was synthesized at room temperature. $ThCl_4$ (0.075 g, 0.2 mmol) was dissolved into 2 mL of H_2O. The solution was then transferred to a 3 mL shell vial containing 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (0.055 g, 0.4 mmol). The vial was then capped, vortexed for less than one minute, and then left on the benchtop at room temperature (initial pH 1.25). Colorless block crystals and white, undissolved ligand were observed after 24 hours. After 2 days, a colorless solution (pH 0.90) was decanted and the reaction product was isolated, washed twice with water, and left under ambient conditions to air dry. We note that efforts to wash away unreacted ligand using ethanol resulted in decomposition of the crystals. Therefore,

block-like crystals of **Th-1** were manually separated from the bulk reaction product (yield 0.021 g, 18.1% based on Th). The yield of compound **Th-1** was found to increase with reaction time; harvesting the crystals after three days resulted in a yield of 44.8% (0.052 g) based on Th. Elemental Analysis: calc (obs): C: 28.76% (28.57%); H: 3.20% (2.93%); N: 0.0% (0.0%). ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, *d*$_3$-ACN, 298 K): δ = 7.87 (-C$_6$H$_4$-), 7.58 (-OH), 6.86 (-C$_6$H$_4$-), 2.30 (br, H$_2$O), 1.94 (CH$_3$CN).

U-1, $U_6O_4(OH)_4(4\text{-}HB)_{12}(H_2O)_6 \cdot 12(H_2O)$, was synthesized in a nitrogen glove box at room temperature following a similar synthetic procedure as that described for **Th-1**. A solution of UCl_4 (0.076 g, 0.2 mmol) in H_2O (2.00 g, 111 mmol) was added to a 3 mL shell vial containing 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (0.055 g, 0.4 mmol). The initial pH of the solution was 0.86. The vial was capped, vortexed for less than one minute, and then left undisturbed on the benchtop. After 24 hours, green block crystals along with white undissolved organic were observed. After 2 days, the solution (pH 0.66) was decanted and the product was washed twice with water and then with ethanol to remove unreacted organic. The crystals were then left under N_2 to dry. Yield based on U: 0.010 g, 8.50 %. The yield of **U-1** was likewise found to increase with reaction time albeit to a lesser extent; harvesting the crystals after three days resulted in a yield of 12.8% (0.015 g) based on U. Elemental Analysis: calc (obs): C: 27.63% (27.71%); H: 3.55% (3.70%); N: 0.0% (0.0%).

UO_2 Nanoparticle Preparation. A similar synthetic procedure as described above for **U-1** was used to study the effects of temperature on UO_2 nanoparticle formation. A solution of UCl_4 (0.076 g, 0.2 mmol) in 50/50 H_2O/ACN (2 mL) was added to a 5 mL screw-cap vial containing 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (0.055 g, 0.4 mmol). The vial was capped, sealed with parafilm, and the reactants were vortexed for less than one minute. The reaction solution was then heated at 100 °C for 24 hours. The vial was removed from heat and allowed to cool for one hour. UO_2 nanoparticles were then separated from the reaction solution by first diluting 1 mL of the heated solution into 10 mL of nanopure water. The diluted solution was then centrifuged for 1 hour at 14,500 rpm and 18 °C, resulting in the formation of two layers. A lighter clear, green solution was removed from a dark blackish-green solution. The dark blackish-green solution, containing

the UO_2 nanoparticles, was then drop-casted onto a sample holder for analysis by powder X-ray diffraction.

X-Ray Structure Determination. Single crystals were selected from the bulk samples and mounted on MiTeGen micromounts in mineral oil. Reflections were collected at 100 K on a Bruker D8 QUEST diffractometer equipped with a CMOS detector using Mo-Kα radiation (λ = 0.71073 Å). The data were integrated and corrected for absorption using SAINT[30, 31] and a multi-scan technique in SADABS,[32] included in the APEX2 crystallographic software package.[33] The structures were solved using SHELXT and refined by full-matrix least-squares on F2 using the SHELXL[34] software in SHELXle.[35] Structural models of **Th-1** and **U-1** consisting of the ligand decorated hexanuclear core as well as twelve solvate water molecules (per formula unit) were developed; however, the positions of the solvate water molecules were poorly determined. As a result, a second model was refined with contributions from the solvent water molecules removed from the diffraction data using the bypass procedure in PLATON.[36] The electron count from the "squeezed" model converged in good agreement with the number of solvate molecules found during the refinement of **Th-1** and **U-1**. The squeezed data are reported. Crystallographic information for these compounds can be found in Table 1.

For the structures of both of **Th-1** and **U-1,** the HOAr portions of the ligands were disordered over two positions; the paired O-C and C-C distances were thus restrained to be similar. The μ_3-hydroxo/oxo groups (O1 and O2) of the hexanuclear core as well as the bound water molecule (O3) were each disordered over two sites and refined accordingly. Water and coordinated hydroxyl H atoms could not be located during refinement and as such were not included in the structural model. Hydroxyl H and remaining H atoms of the ligand were placed

in calculated positions. Further details of the structure refinement of **Th-1** and **U-1** are provided as Supporting Information.

Table 1. Crystallographic Structure Refinement Details for **Th-1** and **U-1** (100 K).[a]

	Th-1	**U-1**
Formula	$Th_6C_{84}H_{76}O_{50}$	$U_6C_{84}H_{76}O_{50}$
MW (g/mol)	3277.68	3313.62
Temperature (K)	100(2)	100(2)
Crystal System	Trigonal	Trigonal
Space Group	*R-3c*	*R-3c*
λ (Å)	0.71073	0.71073
a (Å)	21.449(1)	21.369(4)
b (Å)	21.449(1)	21.369(4)
c (Å)	38.255(2)	38.300(8)
α (deg)	90	90
β (deg)	90	90
γ (deg)	120	120
Volume ($Å^3$)	15242(2)	15146(6)
Z	6	6
ρ (g/cm^3)	2.143	2.180
μ (mm^{-1})	8.843	9.684
R_1	0.0290	0.0364
wR_2	0.1220	0.1613
GOF	1.062	1.491
CCDC	1579521	1579522

[a]The formula and formula weight reported do not reflect the solvent water molecules present in the structure.

Powder X-ray Diffraction. Powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) data were collected for compounds **Th-1** and **U-1** using a Rigaku Ultima IV diffractometer (Cu Kα λ = 1.542 Å, 2θ = 3 – 40°). Agreement between the calculated and observed patterns (Figures S3-S4) supported that the single crystals used for structure determination were representative of the bulk sample. UO_2 nanoparticles resulting from the temperature studies *vide supra* were confirmed through comparison of the experimental powder pattern with that reported for UO_2 (ICSD reference code 35204; Figures S5).

Elemental Analysis. Combustion elemental analysis (EA) was collected on a PerkinElmer Model 2400 Elemental Analyzer. Samples (1.5 – 2.0 mg) were weighed into small tin capsules. The samples were run in triplicate and the reported value is the average of three runs.

Infrared and Raman Spectroscopy. Infrared spectra of **Th-1** and **U-1** were collected on a Perkin Elmer FTIR Spectrum 2 system (Figure S6). The samples were diluted with dried KBr and pressed into a pellet. Scans were collected over 400 – 4000 cm^{-1} with 16 scans and 2 cm^{-1} resolution. The data were acquired using the Spectrum Quant software program. Raman spectra of single crystals of **Th-1** and **U-1** were collected on a HORIBA LabRAM HR Evolution Raman Microscope with an excitation line of 532 nm (Figure S7).

Thermogravimeteric Analysis. Thermogravimetric analysis data were collected on a TA instruments Q50 system Thermogravimetric Analyzer. Samples of **Th-1** (10.088 mg) and **U-1** (9.966 mg) were weighed out into platinum pans. The temperature was held at 30 °C for 30 minutes to dry off excess water after which the sample was heated to 600 °C at 5 °C min^{-1} under flowing nitrogen (10 mL min^{-1}). The software TA universal analysis was used to collect and process the data (Figure S12 and S13).

Magnetic Studies. Magnetic data were collected for **U-1** on a Quantum Design Magnetic Property Measurement System (MPMS-7). Temperature-dependent data were collected under applied 1 T DC fields from 2 to 300 K, and field dependent data were performed at 2 K with varying applied magnetic field strengths ranging from 0 to 7 T. Corrections for the intrinsic diamagnetism of the samples were made using Pascal's constants.[37]

Solution Studies

As a means of examining the stability of the hexanuclear clusters as well as the effects of reaction time and temperature on solution speciation, a series of solutions were prepared for analysis by optical absorption spectroscopy and small angle X-ray scattering (SAXS). However, because thorium has a $[Rn]5f^0$ electron configuration and is spectroscopically silent, we limited these studies to uranium for which both optical spectroscopy and SAXS could be used synergistically to elucidate solution speciation.

Reaction Time Studies.

The evolution of the reaction solutions as a function of time was investigated. Solutions were prepared following the synthetic procedure outlined for **U-1** previously. Aliquots of the mother liquor were collected after 1, 24, and 48 hours.

Dissolution Studies.

Crystals of **U-1** are insoluble in water but were readily soluble in acetonitrile. As such, the compounds were dissolved in acetonitrile to examine the stability of the hexanuclear units upon dissolution.

Temperature Studies.

The evolution of speciation as a function of temperature was examined for reactions prepared in 50/50 acetonitrile/water solvent mixture. The choice of solvent systems arose from the limited solubility of the ligand in water, the observation that reactions prepared in water showed little to no scattering, and the limited solubility of UCl_4 in 100% acetonitrile. Acetonitrile/water reaction solutions were thus prepared with the molar ratios used for the preparation of **U-1**. The solutions were heated for one day at 25, 50, 75, and 100 °C. Aliquots of the mother liquor were subsequently collected and analyzed.

Small Angle X-ray Scattering. All solutions were filtered (Target2 NYLON, 0.45 μm) and sealed in 1.5 mm glass capillaries (Hampton Research). Data were collected on an Anton-Paar SAXSess instrument utilizing Cu Kα radiation (λ = 1.542 Å) and line collimation. Background subtraction was performed using acetonitrile, water, or 50/50 acetonitrile/water mixture, mirroring experimental solution conditions. SAXS data collections were 30 minutes in length; data were recorded over a range of 0.08 – 2.5 $Å^{-1}$ on an image plate at a distance of 26.1 cm from the X-ray source. SAXSQUANT software was used for data collection, treatment, and preliminary analysis (normalization, primary beam removal, background subtraction, desmearing, and smoothing). Further modeling of the SAXS data, including size distribution and PDDF analyses, were performed utilizing IRENA[38] macros within the IGORPro 6.3 software. A simulated scattering curve of **U-1** was calculated from SolX[39] using a structural file (xyz) derived from the single crystal X-ray diffraction data.

Optical Absorption Spectroscopy. Optical data of the uranium (IV) solutions were collected from 400 – 700 nm on an Agilent Technologies Cary 5000 UV-Vis-NIR with a double beam liquid attachment. The solutions were diluted by a factor of 5 and an aliquot was placed in a quartz cuvette. Solid-state UV-vis-NIR data were collected for **U-1** using a Craic Technologies

microspectrophotometer. A single crystal was paced on a quartz slide in immersion oil, and the data were collected from 300 nm to 1100 nm.

Dynamic Light Scattering. Dynamic light scattering data were collected for the 50/50 acetonitrile/water reaction solution that was heated at 100 °C for 24 hours in an effort to further support the particle size obtained from SAXS studies. The mother liquor (1 mL) was diluted with 3 mL of 50/50 acetonitrile/water solution to reduce the effects of multiple scattering. For an accurate hydrodynamic radius and corresponding uncertainty value, ten separate samples were analyzed by DLS and the values were then averaged. Data were collected at room temperature using an Ar ion laser (λ = 488 nm) with a scattering angle of 90° relative to the incident beam. Scattered light was collected by a single mode optical fiber, which was coupled to a photon counting avalanche photodiode. The photon count rates were processed by an ALV5000 hardware autocorrelator board. The distribution of diffusion times was determined using the ALV NonLin fitting routine, a nonlinear constrained regularization of the autocorrelation function based on CONTIN, between delay times of 600 ns and 367 ms.[40] The Stokes-Einstein relation was used in order to convert the distribution of diffusion times to a corresponding distribution of the hydrodynamic radius, along with the viscosity of the 50/50 acetonitrile water solution mixture of 0.81[41] and refractive index of 1.3478.[42]

NMR Spectroscopy. Approximately 5 mg of **Th-1** was dissolved into 1 mL of d_3-ACN (concentration of ~1.5 mM). ^{1}H NMR spectrum was obtained on a Varian MR-400 MHz Spectrometer using d_3-acetonitrile (d_3-ACN) as the internal reference with the chemical shift calibrated to the peak at 1.94 ppm. The ^{1}H NMR spectrum was analyzed using the MestReNova software program. The NMR spectrum is shown in Figure S8. The two peaks at 6.86 and 7.87

ppm are attributed to the ligand while the peak at 7.58 ppm is correlated to the -OH found in the cluster core. The broad signal at 2.30 ppm is consistent with water in the cluster.[43, 44]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structure Descriptions. The structures of **Th-1** and **U-1** are built from a 4-hydroxybenzoate decorated hexanuclear $[An_6O_4(OH)_4]^{12+}$ cluster that is closely related to other ligated hexanuclear units previously reported for tetravalent metal ions including Zr, Ce, Th, U, Np, and Pu.[12, 16, 17, 23, 45-47,48] For thorium and uranium, specifically, related hexanuclear clusters have been formed in the presence of both monocarboxylate (formate, acetate, chloroacetate, glycine) and polycarboxylate (fumarate, terephthalate, 2,6-napthalenedicarboxylate, and 4,4'biphenyldicarboxylate, DOTA) ligands.[4, 9, 17, 49,18, 24]

In the structure of **Th-1** and **U-1**, each An(IV) center is 9-coordinate, bound to four μ_3-OH/ μ_3-O oxygen atoms, one bound water molecule, and four oxygen atoms from one bidentate and two monodentate 4-hydroxybenzoate ligands. As shown in Figure 1, the μ_3-OH/ μ_3-O oxygen atoms are disordered over two sites. The longer An- μ_3-OH and shorter An- μ_3-O bond distances average 2.49(8) Å and 2.30(6) Å for **Th-1** and 2.45(7) Å and 2.25(5) Å for **U-1**. The An-O bond distances for the bound water molecules are slightly elongated as compared to those of the μ_3-OH/ μ_3-O sites, with Th-O(H_2) and U-O(H_2) distances of 2.53(3) Å and 2.50(5) Å, respectively. The remaining oxygen atoms are contributed from three 4-HB ligands with An-$O_{carboxylate}$ distances ranging from 2.441(4)-2.667(4) Å for Th and 2.38(5)-2.66(4) Å for U. As shown in Figure 1, two of the 4-HB ligands link each metal to two adjacent metal centers within the cluster with Th---Th and U---U distances of 3.912(1) Å and 3.83(3) Å, respectively. Interestingly, though the hexanuclear $[An_6O_4(OH)_4]^{12+}$ unit is analogous to those previously

reported for Th and U, we note that the arrangement of the ligands as well as the position of the water molecules in **Th-1** and **U-1** are unique to the 4-HB decorated analogs reported here. That is, previously reported hexanuclear Th(IV) and U(IV) clusters more commonly consist of a hexanuclear unit, wherein twelve bridging ligands decorate the cluster, with four carboxylate donors linking each metal center to its four adjacent neighbors; water molecules cap the coordination sphere typically forming a square antiprism coordination geometry. By comparison, each metal center in **Th-1** and **U-1** is capped by a chelating 4-HB unit (Figure 1a). Additionally, though the ligands terminate the clusters resulting in discrete molecular units, weak π-π interactions, C-H-π, and hydrogen bonding interactions further associate the ligand decorated units into an extended supramolecular network (Figure 1b). These interaction distances were calculated using PLATON and are summarized in the Supporting Information.[50] For **Th-1** and **U-1,** C-H-π interaction distances were found to range from 3.53(2)-3.74(3) Å and 3.41(3)-3.69(2) Å, respectively. Hydrogen bonding was also present between clusters, with donor-acceptor distances ranging from 2.43(4)-3.47(6) Å for **Th-1** and 2.28(5)-3.27(5) Å for **U-1**, with relative hydrogen bonding strength classified as strong to weak interactions, respectively.[51]

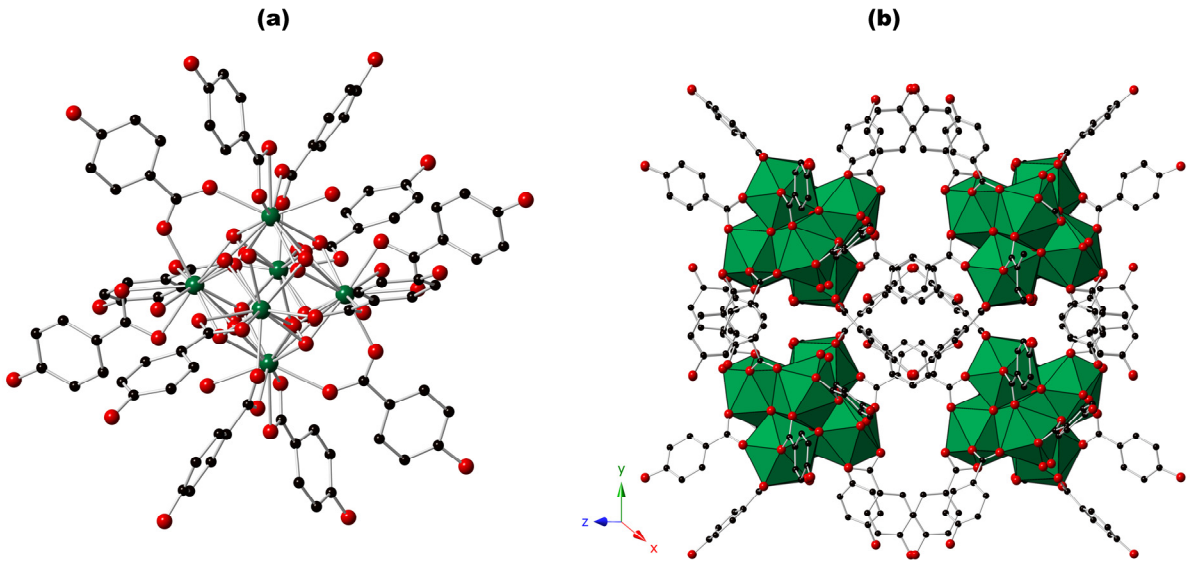

Figure 1. (a) Ball and stick representation of the ligand decorated hexanuclear clusters that constituent **Th-1** and **U-1**. (b) Packing diagram of **U-1**. As the two compounds are isomorphous, only the U analog is shown. Green, red, and black spheres represent uranium(IV), oxygen, and carbon atoms, respectively. Green polyhedra in (b) are 9-coordinate U(IV) metal centers. Hydrogen atoms and the disorder of the 4-HB ligands are not shown for clarity.

Synthesis. Both **Th-1** and **U-1** were synthesized from room temperature reactions of the respective metal chloride salt and 4-hydroxybenzoic acid in water. For both thorium and uranium, the yields were found to increase with reaction time. This may be attributed to the limited solubility of 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (0.5g/100 mL) and the slow dissolution of the ligand over time that likely limits the amount of **Th-1** or **U-1** that can form over a given reaction time. In fact, for the synthesis of both **Th-1** and **U-1**, the ligand is not completely soluble and even after three days there remains unreacted ligand. In an attempt to better understand the role that the availability of the ligand had on the reaction yield as well as the identity of the complexes that may exist in solution at various time points of the reaction *vide infra*, for the uranium solutions, we filtered the reactions after one hour and determined the amount of ligand that remained undissolved. Only 12 mg (21.8%) of the ligand dissolved after 1 hour. Based on the available ligand in solution, we suspect that if the hexamer were to exist as a fully ligand decorated unit in solution as has been established by previous literature reports, the 4-HB decorated hexamer could only account for ~22% of the U in solution.

Importantly, we added no base to promote hydrolysis to obtain the oxo and hydroxyl ligands of the hexamers or to deprotonate the ligand and allow ligation to An(IV). Despite this, the hexamer formed. The effect of pH has been investigated prior, and suggests pH >2 is required for $U(IV)_6$ self-assembly, while $Th(IV)_6$ is optimally formed at pH~3. [25] On the other hand, the hexamers have never been isolated without bridging ligands such as carboxylates, and the $An(IV)_2$ dimer joined by hydroxide has been noted as an important intermediate, which

aggregates rapidly to hexamers upon addition of a bridging ligand. [16] While the addition of base in these experiments would both drive hydrolysis and increase dissolution of the ligand, pH<1.5 *without* added base provided highest yields. This difference from prior investigations affirms the role of the bridging ligand in promoting self-assembly, by bringing metal centers into close proximity.

Optical Absorption Spectroscopy and Small Angle X-ray Scattering Studies.

Tetravalent uranium compounds display rich optical spectra that are dominated by characteristic U(IV) *f-f* transitions from the $^3H_4$ ground state.[7, 52-55] Recently, the peaks centered between 610-690 nm corresponding to three electronic transitions $^3H_4 \rightarrow {}^3P_0$, $^3H_4 \rightarrow {}^1G_4$, and $^3H_4 \rightarrow {}^1D_2$ have been used with some success to infer U(IV) solution speciation in other carboxylate ligand systems. For example, Nyman *et al*.[8] and Tamain *et al.*[17] showed that the optical spectra for solutions consisting primarily of monomeric U(IV) species have distinctly different features from those collected for solutions (or solids) known to consist predominately of hexameric units, with differences in the position, splitting, and perhaps most importantly relative intensity of the peaks indicative of the U(IV) complexes present in solution. The optical spectra observed for monomeric and hexameric units have thus become fairly diagnostic of the nuclearity of the complex.[7, 52, 56] For monomeric complexes the lower wavelength peak often has a much higher intensity relative to the higher wavelength peak as represented by the spectrum obtained for a solution of U(IV) in 1M HCl which is expected to consist predominately of monomers (Figure 2). By comparison, the solid state spectrum for **U-1**, known to consist of hexanuclear units, exhibits a blue shift as well as considerable differences in the relative intensity of the peaks between 610-690 nm. Such changes are indicative, and indeed signatures, for hexanuclear units that together with small angle X-ray scattering exemplify powerful techniques to not only probe

solution speciation but also determine the relative size, shape and interactions between dissolved species.[8, 17] These studies and results are described below.

Evolution of Reaction Solutions. The filtered aqueous reaction solution was monitored at three time intervals via SAXS and optical spectroscopy: at 1, 24, and 48 hours after U(IV) and 4-HBA had been combined in the reaction vial in water (denoted sol_{H2O}-1h, sol_{H2O}-24h, and sol_{H2O}-48h, respectively). The optical data are presented in Figure 2. The spectrum of sol_{H2O}-1h agrees well with the spectrum obtained for **U-1**, particularly in the region of 610-690 nm; however, it is worth noting that the spectrum is not distinctly characteristic of hexameric units for which (based on previously reported data) the ratio of the intensity of the peak centered at 654 nm over the intensity of the peak centered at 668 nm would be expected to be less than 1.[8] This is consistent with the limited solubility of the ligand, and the fact that if the hexamer were to exist as a fully decorated unit in solution, it can only account for roughly 22% of the total dissolved uranium. Thus, we suspect that the optical spectrum likely has contributions from multiple species in solution, one of which may include the hexamer. With time there is a clear evolution of the absorption bands. Notably, the spectra obtained for sol_{H2O}-24h, sol_{H2O}-48h exhibit absorption bands that are more consistent with those characteristic of lower nuclearity (e.g. monomeric) complexes. These data are consistent with the observation that after 24 hours **U-1** is observed as a crystalline phase and hence hexameric units may no longer exist in appreciable concentrations in solution.

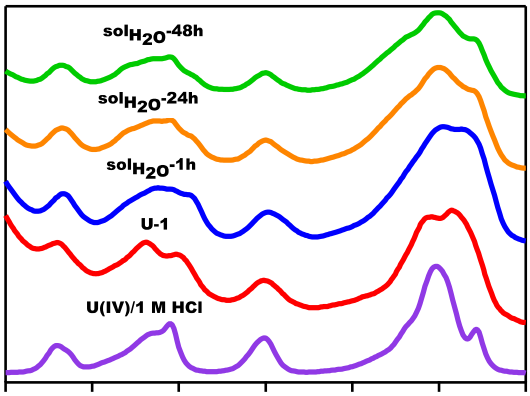

Figure 2. Optical spectra of the aqueous reaction solutions that led to the formation of **U-1** at 1 hour (blue), 24 hours (orange), and 48 hours (green). The spectra for **U-1** (red) and U(IV) in 1 M HCl (purple) are shown for comparison.

Soluble species in these systems were also examined using SAXS. Scattering curves for the reaction solutions (sol$_{H2O}$-1h, sol$_{H2O}$-24h, sol$_{H2O}$-48h) were collected and compared to the simulated curve of **U-1** as shown in Figure 3. The experimental scattering curves of the reaction solutions exhibit relatively low scattering intensity indicating that the solution phase species are smaller than the expected hexanuclear units. The simulated scattering curve is generated from the **U-1** solid-state structure, using SolX. If the hexameric clusters were present to an appreciable extent in solution we would expect the experimental and simulated scattering curves to closely match, particularly in the Guinier region (0.1-1.0 Å^{-1}), where considerable structural information can be determined.[57] Increasing reaction time for the uranium/4-hydroxybenzioc acid systems leads to a decrease rather than an increase in scattering intensity. At time = 1 hr, there is a distinct Guinier region between q=0.5-0.7 Å^{-1}, which would indicate small spherical species, i.e. hexamers or tetramers.[8, 58, 59] However, this feature is no longer apparent after one hour. We interpret this as hexamers exist to a small extent in solution due to 1) the limited solubility of the ligand and 2) the rapid precipitation/crystallization of hexamers, both of which limit the

concentration of hexamers in solution. Increasing reaction time also gives rise to a feature at q=1.4 $Å^{-1}$, which through the relationship d = 2π/q is consistent with metal-metal interactions at a distance of ~4.5 Å.[60] This feature remained present despite background subtraction and therefore can be attributed to abundant scattering species larger than a dimer, mainly metal-metal interactions given that the actinides are the strongest scatterers present in solution. The distance is a little longer than M-M distances of ~4.0 Å which are typically found within solid-state oxo or hydroxo bridged oligomers.[12] However, this distance is consistent with those An---An distances found in carboxylate bridged chains of thorium such as those described for thorium terephthalates and pyridinedicarboxylates.[6, 61] An increase in intensity of this feature illustrates an evolution of the species as a function of time. Further, the linear slope between q ≈ 0.3 – 1.4 $Å^{-1}$ of the reaction solutions suggests aggregation in solution. The linear feature in the scattering curves could indicate oligomeric chain-like species,[60, 62] a motif that is commonly observed for actinide compounds isolated from aqueous solution in which actinide metal centers are bridged through the carboxylate ligand.[12] Similar SAXS features were recently ascribed and modeled as small (avg. three units) bismuth sulfate chains.[63]

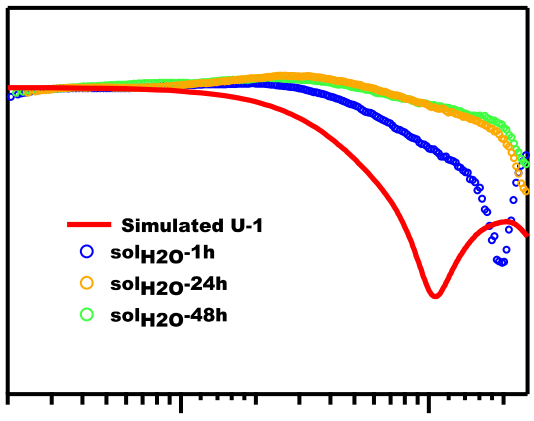

Figure 3. X-ray scattering curves of reaction solutions of **U-1** at various time intervals (1h = blue, 24h = orange, 48h = green) compared to the simulated scattering curve of the hexameric structural unit of **U-1** (red). Intensity is normalized at I_0 (q=0.018 $Å^{-1}$) for comparison.

Taken together, the optical spectra and SAXS data may point to a distribution of species that exist between lower order ligand bridged oligomers and hexamers. The absence of significant scattering in the reaction solutions is consistent with our hypothesis that the ligand decorated hexamers do not exist to an appreciable extent in solution due to both the availability of the ligand which may limit the formation of the hexamer, as well as the propensity of the ligand decorated units to precipitate upon formation, leaving smaller oligomers in solution as evident by the SAXS data. This is in contrast to previous reports describing the synthesis and aqueous phase stability of An(IV) hexamers decorated by monocarboxylates such as formate, acetate, glycine, as well as the polycarboxylate 1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclododecane-1,4,7,10-tetracetate (DOTA) wherein clusters could be observed in solution through various characterization techniques prior to crystallization.[8, 16, 25, 46, 64, 65]

Redissolved Hexameric Units. Hexameric structural units $[AnO_4(OH)_4(H_2O)_6]^{12+}$ are well established in the literature having been shown to exist in the solid-state and, for the monocarboxylate complexes, persist under a range of solution conditions.[6, 12, 16, 22-27, 43, 46, 49, 64-70] Previous reports on the solution behavior of actinide hexanuclear units have shown that not only do hexanuclear units assemble in solution prior to crystallization, but they also remain intact upon re-dissolution of the crystalline product in a variety of solvents.[16, 8, 25, 46, 64, 65] In order to further examine the effects that the ligand may have on the stability of the solution phase species, crystals of **U-1** were redissolved in acetonitrile (sol_{ACN}-U-1) and characterized by both optical spectroscopy and SAXS. This solvent was chosen as it is non-coordinating and therefore should not dissociate the cluster core. Additionally, crystals were not soluble in water.

The optical spectrum of sol_{ACN}-U-1 displays characteristic U(IV) *f-f* transitions from the $^3H_4$ ground state and exhibits similar absorption bands to those found in the spectrum obtained from crystals of **U-1** (Figure 4).[7, 52-55] However, like the optical spectrum obtained for sol_{H2O}-1h the peaks are not distinctly characteristic of the hexanuclear units as described in previous reports.

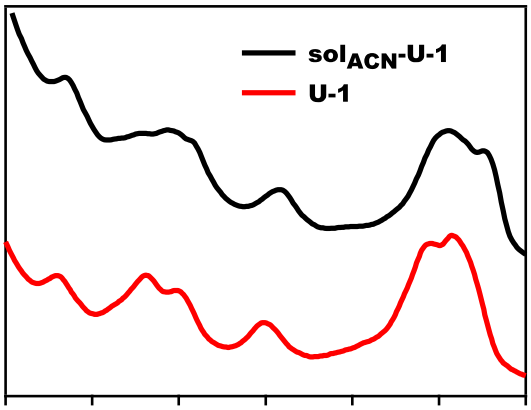

Figure 4. Optical spectra of a single crystal of **U-1** (red) and **U-1** dissolved in acetonitrile (black).

Experimental X-ray scattering curves were compared to the simulated scattering curves, shown in Figure 5. Qualitatively, the experimental scattering curve for sol_{ACN}-U-1 resembles the general shape of the simulated hexameric structural unit. However, the Guinier region centered at q =0.2-0.6 $Å^{-1}$ for the experimental scattering curve is shifted to a lower q value, suggesting the dissolved clusters have an apparent larger radius of gyration ($R_g^2 = 3/5(Ø/2)^2$; Ø = diameter of spherical cluster) in acetonitrile solution.[57, 62]

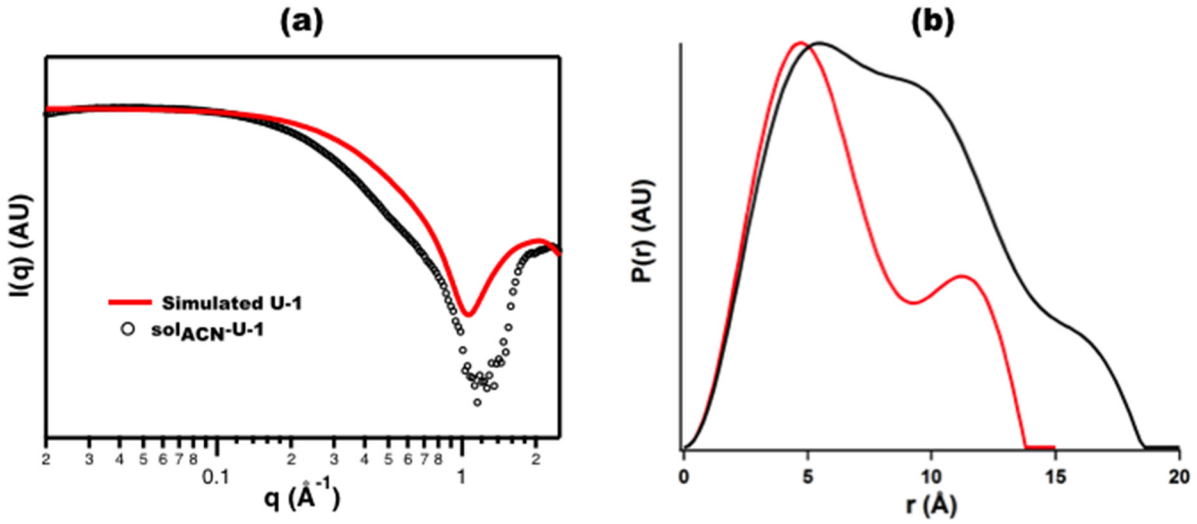

Figure 5. (a) X-ray scattering curves of **U-1** crystals dissolved in acetonitrile (black) compared to the simulated scattering curve of the hexameric structural unit (red). (b) PDDF (pair distance distribution function) derived from each scattering curve. Line color same as the scattering curves.

Pair distance distribution function (PDDF, Figure 5b) analysis via the Moore method[71] of both the simulated **U-1** and the sol$_{ACN}$-U-1 provided insight. The PDDF for both the simulated **U-1** and sol$_{ACN}$-U-1 show a Gaussian distribution with a width of about 8 Å, and additional lower intensity distributions, where the scattering probability goes to 0 at 14 Å (simulated) and 18.5 Å (experimental). Briefly, the PDDF is a histogram of distances within the cluster, weighted by electron density contrast (i.e. electron density and probability both contribute to the vertical axis P(r)).[57] Oftentimes PDDF profiles such as these are consistent with a dense core (maximum U_6 core is ~ 8 Å); and a lower density shell of the hydrocarbon ligands, approximately consistent with the solid-state structure. , The R_g derived from the PDDF fit of the simulated **U-1** is 5.2 Å.[72] The PDDF analysis of sol$_{ACN}$-U-1 (acetonitrile) indicates larger clusters, consistent with the scattering curve (R_g=6.2 Å). Additionally there appears to be stronger experimental scattering from the shell of the cluster where the ligands reside. Since crystals of pure **U-1** were dissolved, and we expect **U-1** to be stable in this 'benign' solvent, we propose the increased scattering from

the shell in the experimental data is from ordered packing of solvent molecules between the rigid ligands.

Evolution of Solution Species as a Function of Temperature. Temperature, along with pH, are two factors that are well known to promote hydrolysis and condensation of the actinides.[12, 73] However, there are limited studies that have established the effect that the ligand may have on the transformation of lower order oligomers to higher order oligomers. As such, we examined solutions of U(IV) and 4-hydroxybenzoate in 50/50 H_2O/ACN solutions at 25, 50, 75, and 100 °C (denoted $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-25, $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-50, $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-75, and $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-100, respectively) using optical spectroscopy and SAXS in order to document the effect ligands may have on the transformation of actinide-oxo clusters with applied heat. In this case, the choice of solvent stemmed from the limited solubility of the ligand and the assembled hexamers in aqueous solution as well as the limited solubility of the UCl_4 in acetonitrile. Moreover, both the optical spectrum and the SAXS curve obtained for $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-25 showed similarities to the data obtained from the acetonitrile solution sol_{ACN}-U-1 suggesting a similar distribution of species in solution.

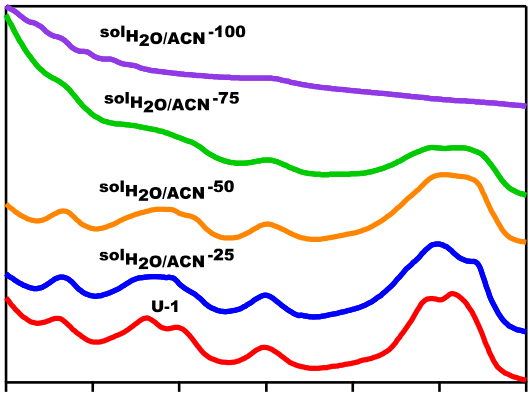

Figure 6. Transformation of the optical spectra of U(IV)/4-HBA reactions in 50/50 H_2O/ACN with increasing temperature (25 °C = blue, 50 °C = orange, 75 °C = green, 100 °C = purple). The spectrum for **U-1** (red) is shown for comparison.

A color change is visually observed when increasing the temperature from 25 °C in which the green solution transforms to a dark green/black solution at temperatures of 75 °C and above. At 100 °C, particles are clearly visible in solution. The optical spectrum was thus examined at 25 °C intervals to observe differences in the absorption bands. Both the decrease in the intensity of the characteristic peaks of U(IV) and the increase in background intensity, such as that highlighted by the spectrum obtained for sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-100 (Figure 6), are consistent with the formation of nanometer sized U(IV) particles or a colloidal phase.[8, 74, 75] The phase was confirmed to be UO_2 nanoparticles with a particle size of 2.65 nm supported by PXRD and the particle size calculated from the Scherrer equation (Figure S5).[12, 27]

To corroborate this finding, X-ray scattering curves for sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-25, sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-50, sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-75, and sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-100 were collected and an evolution of solution species as a function of temperature was observed (Figure 7). The solution at 25 ˚C exhibits a Guinier region at q=0.35-0.7 $Å^{-1}$ in the scattering curve, which can be modeled with size distribution analysis (Figure S9) to have an average particle radius of 3.84 Å, slightly smaller than the simulated **U-1**

radius of 4.14 Å. Interestingly, the **U-1** solution in mixed water-acetonitrile displays a coulombic peak with a maximum intensity around 0.2 $Å^{-1}$, whereas the pure acetonitrile solution does not display this. This indicates clusters interact differently, based on solvent composition.

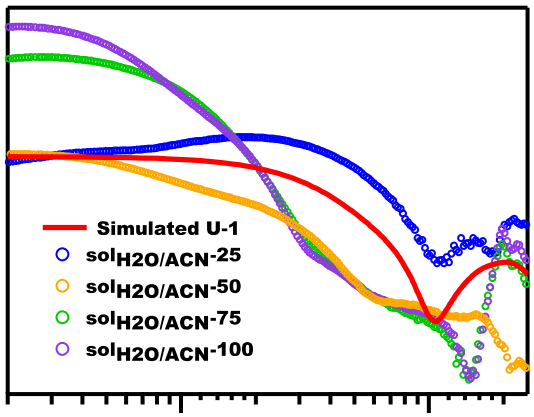

Figure 7. X-ray scattering curves of sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-25 (blue), sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-50 (orange), sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-75 (green), and sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-100 (purple). The simulated scattering curve of **U-1** (red) is shown for reference.

When the temperature of the reaction is increased to 50 ˚C, a distinct change in the X-ray scattering curve compared to 25 ˚C is observed. At low q (0.02-0.25 $Å^{-1}$), the slope is consistent with a power law dependence of $\sim q^{-1}$ indicating a linear arrangement of particles in solution.[76] When fit with a cylindrical model, the fit matches the experimental data to yield two populations with radii of 4.43 and 7.17 Å (Figure S10). Heating to 75 and 100 ˚C results in a significant increase in scattering intensity at low q in comparison to the scattering data at 50 ˚C. For the 75 ˚C solution, we fit the scattering curve between 0.02-0.35 $Å^{-1}$ with a spherical model with a radius = 16.0 (±5.8) Å, yielding a particle size of ~32 Å (Figure S11). The curve for sol$_{H2O/ACN}$-100 displays a similar scattering curve to the 75 ˚C curve, with more intense scattering at low q as well as a slight shift of the Guinier region to low q, indicative of larger particles. Due to the increase in polydispersity of this sample, we were unable to provide a similar reasonable fit.

Additionally, the increased linearity (instead of curved) of the region between 0.07-0.25 $Å^{-1}$ suggests formation of branched superstructures of the nanoparticles may contribute to the complexity of this scattering data. [8, 76] It should be noted that $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-75 and $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-100 experimental scattering curves were compared to the simulated scattering curve calculated for the largest reported U(IV) cluster (U_{38}).[10] However, no consistency between the scattering curves was observed, indicating that heating **U-1** above 75 ˚C results in oligomeric species much larger than the U_{38} cluster.

Dynamic Light Scattering Studies. To further examine the size and distribution of particles in solution, dynamic light scattering data were collected on diluted samples (25 mM) of $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-100. A normalized fit was obtained with a linear number weighted distribution that showed particles with an average hydrodynamic radius of 3.8 ± 1 nm. The hydrodynamic radius corroborates with the decrease in intensity of the peaks in the optical spectrum observed for $sol_{H2O/ACN}$-100 in Figure 6, which is attributed to the formation of a colloidal phase, as well as the size distribution of ~3.2 nm calculated from the SAXS data. Collectively, DLS, optical spectroscopy, and SAXS observed particles that are smaller than previous reports describing the transformation of glycine decorated hexamers to particles with a radius of 6.2-8.5 nm upon heating,[8, 74] which may imply that the identity of the ligand has an influence on particle formation, with bulkier ligands stabilizing smaller particles. We also note that the DLS distribution showed a component at a larger value that is likely due to aggregates.

Magnetic Studies. Though a number of reports have described the synthesis and structural chemistry of ligand decorated $[An_6O_4(OH)_4]^{12+}$ hexameric units, to the best of our knowledge the magnetic behavior of such compounds have not been extensively described. An important exception is the isopolyoxometalate cluster complex, $[Cp^{\neq}_4(bpy)_2][U_6O_{13}]$, described by Duval,

Burns, Clark and co-workers.[77] Formed from oxidation of organometallic precursors, in this case, the average uranium oxidation state was determined to be $5f^1$ U(V) using magnetic susceptibility measurements. Variable-temperature and field-dependent magnetic measurements were thus performed to examine the magnetic properties of the polynuclear species and also confirm the uranium oxidation states in **U-1** (Figure 8). At room temperature, the μ_{eff} value (3.09 μ_B/U) was consistent with that expected for a U^{4+} cation.[78-81] Upon cooling, the μ_{eff} value decreased steadily to 0.63 μ_B at 2 K. The decrease in moment resulted from the depopulation of crystal field levels of the U^{4+} cations. No saturation of the magnetization in the field dependent measurement was observed at 2 K, also characteristic of a uranium(IV) ion.[82, 83] Overall the magnetic data is consistent with the presence of six U^{4+} cations as observed in **U-1**.

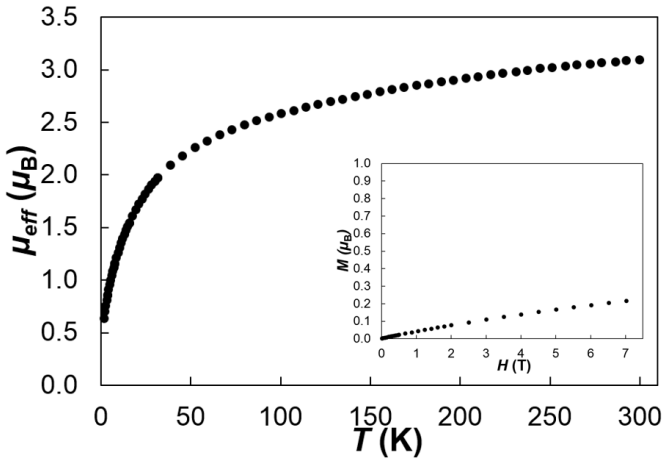

Figure 8. Variable-temperature molar magnetic data (μ_{eff}) for $U_6O_4(OH)_4(H_2O)_6(4\text{-HB})_{12}$ (per uranium cation) and variable field data collected at 2 K (inset).

Thermal Behavior. Relatively few reports have examined the thermal stability of ligand decorated hexanuclear complexes. [9] The thermal stability of **Th-1** and **U-1** were thus examined over 30-600 °C under flowing nitrogen. The TGA plot for **Th-1** (Figure S12) shows a total weight loss of 53% that is consistent with the decomposition of $Th_6O_4(OH)_4(H_2O)_6(4\text{-HB})_{12}\cdot nH_2O$ where n = 6 to ThO_2 (calc 53.2 %). The weight loss occurs in a series of steps, with

the first weight loss of 8.4% occurring over 67 °C to 127 °C. The first weight loss together with the second weight loss that is observed over 127 °C to 232 °C with an additional 4.4% weight loss (total 12.8%) is attributed to the loss of the solvent and bound water molecules as well as the -OH groups from the ligand (calc 12.6 %). Further decomposition of the ligand is then observed over approximately four steps that begins at 232 °C and is complete by approximately 450 °C.

The TGA plot for **U-1** (Figure S13) collected under flowing N_2 shows a weight loss of 9.2% over 50 °C to ~125 °C that is consistent with the loss of the solvent and bound water molecules (calc 9.0%) from the structure. This is immediately followed by a second transition that corresponds to a weight loss of 6% (total weight loss 15.3 %) that is consistent with the loss of the hydroxyl groups from the 4-HB ligands (calc 15.0 %). Over 238 to 450 °C further decomposition of the ligand, occurring in roughly four steps, is observed resulting in a total weight loss of ~54 %. The total observed weight loss (53.7 %) corresponds to the decomposition of **U-1** to six equivalents of UO_2 (calc 54.1 %). Thermal treatments under an air atmosphere of previously reported carboxylate based compounds consisting of the hexanuclear core were found to decompose to α-U_3O_8.[9] We attribute differences in the thermal decomposition products (UO_2 versus α-U_3O_8) to the conditions under which the analyses were performed; under a nitrogen atmosphere UO_2 is formed whereas under air, α-U_3O_8 is observed.

CONCLUSION

Two novel An(IV) carboxylates consisting of ligand decorated $[An_6O_4(OH)_4(H_2O)_6]^{12+}$ hexanuclear cores (An = Th and U) have been synthesized under aqueous conditions. The structures have been determined using single crystal X-ray diffraction and the optical, magnetic, and thermal behavior have been examined. Further, optical spectroscopy in conjunction with

small angle X-ray scattering were used to correlate the hexanuclear units observed in the solid state to species in solution, prior to precipitation of the crystalline phase. The optical and SAXS data suggest that the hydroxybenzoate decorated clusters do not exist to an appreciable extent in solution which we attribute to the relatively low solubility of the ligand used in this work. However, crystals of the U(IV) could be dissolved intact in acetonitrile. Further, the evolution of these oligomers in acetonitrile/water solutions as a function of temperature was explored. The optical and SAXS data displayed an evolution of particle size with increasing temperature, with the species ultimately transforming to nanoparticles on the order of ~3.2 nm at 75-100 °C as determined by SAXS, supported by DLS and PXRD. The results from these studies collectively point to the importance that the ligand may have on both the relative stability and solubility of the hexanuclear units as well as their transformation to larger particles in solution. The strong ligating character of HB usurped the need to add base to drive hydrolysis and condensation from simple An(IV) monomers to hexamers. Such ligand effects and the role that substituted monocarboxylates have on complexation, precipitation, and hydrolysis and condensation processes are the subject of ongoing investigations.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the journal website at DOI: ####.

Synthesis of UCl_4; Structure refinement details; Powder X-ray diffraction patterns; Raman and IR spectra; ^1H NMR Spectrum; Modeling Fits; PDDF Profiles; TGA spectra.

Accession Codes

CCDC 1579521-15799522 contain the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif, or by emailing

data_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk, or by contacting The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre, 12 Union Road, Cambridge CD2 1EZ, UK; fax: +44 1223 336033.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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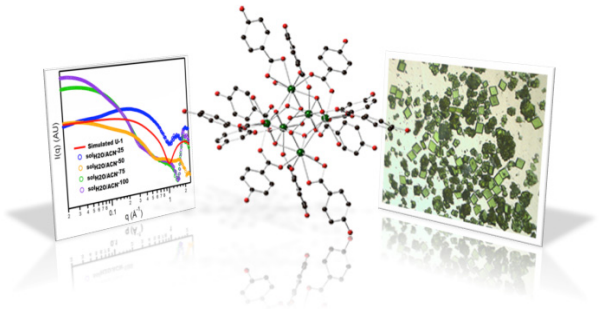

In an effort to further understand the directing effects of ligands on the structural chemistry of An(IV) species, reactions of $AnCl_4$ (An = Th, U) and 4-hydoxybenzoic acid were investigated. The synthesis, structure, thermal behavior, and magnetic properties of two An(IV) compounds are reported. The relationship between the solution and solid-state structural units and the transformation of these species as a function of temperature, determined by optical spectroscopy and small angle X-ray scattering, are described.