Sequential Oxidation of the Cubane [4Fe–4S] Cluster from [4Fe–4S]⁻ to [4Fe–4S]³⁻ in Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻ Complexes

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Abstract: Gaseous Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) clusters and synthetic analogue complexes, Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻ (L = Cl, Br; I; n = 1 – 4), were produced by laser vaporization of a solid Fe/S target and electrospray from solution samples, respectively, and their electronic structures were probed by photoelectron spectroscopy. Low binding energy features derived from minority-spin Fe 3d electrons were clearly distinguished from S-derived bands. We showed that the electronic structure of the simplest Fe₄S₄⁻ cubane cluster can be described by the two-layer spin-coupling model previously developed for the [4Fe] cubane analogues. The photoelectron data revealed that each extra S atom in Fe₄S₄Cl and Fe₄S₄Br removes two minority-spin Fe 3d electrons from the [4Fe–4S] cubane core and each halogen ligand removes one Fe 3d electron from the cubane core in the Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻ complexes, clearly revealing a behavior of sequential oxidation of the cubane over five formal oxidation states: [4Fe–4S]⁻ → [4Fe–4S]₀ → [4Fe–4S]⁺ → [4Fe–4S]²⁺ → [4Fe–4S]³⁺. The current work shows the electron-storage capability of the [4Fe–4S] cubane, contributes to the understanding of its electronic structure, and further demonstrates the robustness of the cubane as a structural unit and electron-transfer center.

1. Introduction

Iron–sulfur proteins are involved in a variety of vital biological processes, such as respiration, photosynthesis, and nitrogen fixation.1–3 The active sites of these proteins normally contain iron–sulfur clusters with one to four iron atoms, among which the cubane [4Fe–4S] cluster is the most prototypical.4 We have been interested in probing the electronic structure and chemical bonding of Fe–S clusters and complexes in the gas phase using photoelectron spectroscopy (PES). We were able to transport a variety of synthetic Fe–S analogue complexes from solution samples to the gas phase using electrospray ionization and systematically investigated their electronic properties.5–10 In particular, we recently studied a series of doubly charged cubane-type anions [Fe₄S₄L₄]²⁻ (L = SC₄H₄, SH, Cl, Br, I) and the Se-analogue [Fe₄Se₄L₄]²⁻ (L = SC₄H₄, Cl) and compared the experimental data with broken symmetry density functional calculations.10 The PES data provided the intrinsic oxidation potentials of the [Fe₄S₄L₄]²⁻ complexes and their dependence on the terminal ligands. During these studies, we observed surprisingly symmetric fission in the doubly charged cubane complexes, [Fe₄S₄L₄]²⁻ → 2[Fe₂S₃L]⁻.11,12 providing direct experimental evidence for the two-layer spin-coupling model for the [4Fe–4S] cubane core.

In the current article, we report sequential oxidation of the cubane [4Fe–4S] core in a series of gaseous cubane complexes. Bare Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) cluster anions were produced both by laser vaporization of a solid Fe/S target and collision-induced dissociation (CID) of [Fe₄S₄(SC₄H₄)₄]²⁻ in an electrospray source. Partially coordinated complexes, Fe₄S₄L₉⁻ (L = Cl, Br, I; n = 1 – 4), with variable oxidation states of the cubane core were produced by CID of the corresponding [Fe₄S₄L₉]⁻ complexes in the electrospray source. The bare Fe₄S₄⁻ cluster possesses five minority-spin Fe 3d electrons, and the [Fe₄S₄L₉]⁻ complexes and the Fe₄S₆⁻ cluster each have only one minority Fe 3d electron. PES features due to the minority-spin 3d electrons were shown to lie at the lowest binding energy part of the spectra and could be readily distinguished from the S-derived PES bands. The PES spectra demonstrated a behavior of sequential oxidation of the [4Fe–4S] cubane core over five formal oxidation states: [4Fe–4S]⁻ → [4Fe–4S]₀ → [4Fe–4S]⁺ → [4Fe–4S]²⁺ → [4Fe–4S]³⁺. Each extra S atom in Fe₄S₅⁻ and Fe₄S₆⁻ was shown to remove two minority-spin Fe 3d electrons from the [4Fe–4S] cubane core,

and each halogen ligand removed one. It is showed that the “inverted level scheme” can be used to describe the electronic structure of the bare Fe₄S₄ clusters and the partially coordinated cubanes. Ligand-induced splittings of the minority-spin Fe 3d bands of the [4Fe–4S] cubane core were also observed as a result of different coordination environments in the two [2Fe–2S] sublayers in the partially coordinated complexes.

2. Experimental Methods

The experiments were performed with two different magnetic-bottle PES apparatuses, one equipped with a laser vaporization supersonic cluster source₁³ and the other with an electrospray ionization source.¹⁴

2.1. PES with the Laser Vaporization Cluster Source. The experiments on bare iron–sulfur clusters Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) were carried out using the laser vaporization PES apparatus. Briefly, a mixed Fe/S target (10/1 molar ratio) was laser-vaporized in the presence of a helium carrier gas. Various Fe₄S₄⁻ clusters were produced from the cluster source and were mass-analyzed using a time-of-flight mass spectrometer. The clusters of interest were selected and decelerated before being photodetached. Three detachment photon energies were available and used in the PES experiment on Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6): 355 nm (3.496 eV) and 266 nm (4.661 eV) from an Nd:YAG laser and 193 nm (6.424 eV) from an ArF excimer laser. Photoelectrons were collected at nearly 100% efficiency by the magnetic bottle and analyzed in a 3.5 m long electron flight tube. Photoelectron spectra were calibrated using the known spectrum of Rh²⁻, and the energy resolution of the apparatus was ΔEk/Ek ≈ 2.5%, that is, ~25 meV for 1 eV electrons.

2.2. PES with the Electrospray Ion Source. The experiments on the Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ (L = Cl, Br, I; n = 1–4) complexes were carried out using the electrospray PES apparatus.¹⁴ Briefly, 10⁻³ M solutions of (Bu₄N)₂[Fe₄S₄L₄] (L = Cl, Br, I) in O₂-free acetonitrile were sprayed through a 0.01 mm diameter syringe needle (biased at ~2.2 kV) under N₂ atmosphere. The resulting charged droplets were fed into a desolvation capillary heated to ~80°C. A negative DC voltage (~2 V) was applied to the skimmer after the capillary to achieve CID. Anions formed in the desolvation capillary and the CID products were guided by a radio frequency quadrupole device into a quadrupole ion trap. Ions were accumulated for 0.1 s in the trap before being pulsed out into the extraction zone of a time-of-flight mass spectrometer. The fragment anions of interest, i.e., Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ can be formed by either removal of an L⁻ ligand from the parent diion ([Fe₄S₄L₄]⁻ → Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ + L⁻) or Fe–L bond scission from the Fe₄S₄L₄⁻ singly charged anion (Fe₄S₄L₄⁻ → Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ + L). Subsequent CID required Fe–L bond scission from the singly charged Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ fragment to produce the smaller Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ singly charged fragments, i.e., Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ → Fe₄S₄L₂⁻ + L⁻. For L = Cl, we could not observe this bond scission process. But, for L = I, this process can go all the way down to the bare Fe₄S₄ cluster. Bare Fe₄S₄⁻ and Fe₄S₄⁻ clusters were also produced from CID of [Fe₄S₄(SEt)₄]²⁻ from electrospray of a (Bu₄N)₂[Fe₄S₄(SEt)₄] solution.

The fragment anions of interest, i.e., Fe₄S₄L₃⁻ (L = Cl, Br, I) and Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6), were mass-selected and decelerated before being intercepted by a probe laser beam in the detachment zone of the magnetic-bottle electron analyzer. The spectra of Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) from CID were measured for comparison with data taken with the laser vaporization cluster source. Two photon energies, 193 and 157 nm (7.866 eV), from an excimer laser were used for photodetachment on the CID products. Photoelectrons were collected at nearly 100% efficiency by the magnetic-bottle and analyzed in a 4 m long electron flight tube. Photoelectron time-of-flight spectra were collected and then converted to kinetic energy spectra, calibrated by the known spectra of I⁻ and O⁻. The energy resolution (ΔEk/Ek) was about 2%, i.e., ~10 meV for 0.5 eV electrons, as measured from the spectrum of I⁻ at 355 nm.

3. Results

3.1. PES of Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) Produced from Laser Vaporization. Photoelectron spectra of Fe₄S₄⁻ at three photon energies are shown in Figure 1. The 355 nm spectrum (Figure 1a) revealed three bands (X, A, and B). The X band with a vertical detachment energy (VDE) of 2.37 eV was relatively sharp. Since no vibrational structures were resolved, the adiabatic detachment energy (ADE) was evaluated by drawing a straight line at the leading edge of the X band and then adding the instrumental resolution to the intersection with the binding energy axis. The well-defined onset of feature X allows a fairly accurate ADE of 2.30 ± 0.02 eV to be obtained, which represents the EA of the corresponding neutral Fe₄S₄ species. At 266 nm (Figure 1b), the B band was better defined, and another intense band C was revealed at 3.5 eV. The 193 nm spectrum (Figure 1c) showed the overall PES pattern of Fe₄S₄⁻: three weak low binding energy bands (X, A, and B) followed by an intense and broader C band. The higher binding energy part of the 193 nm spectrum appeared to be continuous, indicative of the high density of electronic states. The spectra of Fe₄S₅⁻ and Fe₄S₆⁻ are shown in Figure 2 at two photon energies. For Fe₄S₅⁻, three well-defined bands (X, A, and B) were observed at 266 nm (Figure 2a); the A band overlapped with the more intense B band. The well-resolved X...
The spectra of Fe₄S₄Cl₄ are shown in Figure 3. The spectra of Fe₄S₄Cl₄ are continuous. For Fe₄S₆ spectrum as revealed at 193 nm (Figure 2d) also appeared to be continuous. The spectra of Fe₄S₅ are compared with those of Fe₄S₄ and Fe₄S₆. The labels “d” indicate features from detachment of Fe 3d electrons, and “S” denotes features derived from S 3p derived molecular orbitals. See text for details.

The 193 nm spectrum of Fe₄S₄Cl₄ is compared with those of Fe₄S₅ and Fe₄S₆. The labels “d” indicate features from detachment of Fe 3d electrons, as will be discussed later. The spectra of Fe₄S₄Cl₄ at 193 nm (Figure 2d) also appeared to be continuous. For Fe₄S₅, the 266 nm spectrum (Figure 2b) revealed two partially overlapped bands (X and A). An ADE of 3.94 eV was estimated from the sharp onset of band X, which revealed two partially overlapped bands (X and A). An ADE of 3.94 eV was estimated from the sharp onset of band X, which also defined the EA of the Fe₄S₆ neutral cluster. The 193 nm spectrum revealed more well-defined features beyond 4.5 eV (Figure 2c).

The 193 nm spectrum of Fe₄S₄Cl₄ is compared with those of Fe₄S₅ and Fe₄S₆ in Figure 2. The most remarkable feature in the three spectra is the intense band labeled as “S”, meaning from S 3p derived molecular orbitals (MOs), as will be discussed later. The S band is similar in the three spectra and has the same VDE in the cases of Fe₄S₅ and Fe₄S₆. This band becomes the demarcation line in the spectra. Features to the right of the S band at lower binding energies are weaker in intensity and diminishes in numbers. These weak features are labeled as “d”, meaning minority-spin Fe 3d derived bands. To the right of the S band at higher binding energies, all spectra became very complicated and only that of Fe₄S₅ exhibited resolved features. The binding energies of the spectra increase significantly, in particular from Fe₄S₄ to Fe₄S₆. The observed VDEs for the d and S features and the ground-state ADEs are given in Table 1.

### Table 1. Measured Adiabatic and Vertical Detachment Energies (eV) of the Low Binding Energy Features from the Photoelectron Spectra of Fe₄S₅⁻ (n = 4–6) and Fe₄S₄Ln⁻ (L = Cl, Br, I; n = 1–4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>species</th>
<th>cubane core</th>
<th>ADE&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>VDE&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fe₄S₅⁻</td>
<td>[Fe₄S₄]⁻</td>
<td>2.30 (2)</td>
<td>2.37 (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fe₄S₅⁻</td>
<td>[Fe₄S₃]⁺</td>
<td>3.48 (2)</td>
<td>3.56 (2)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>[Fe₄S₃]⁺</td>
<td>3.94 (2)</td>
<td>4.05 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe₄S₄Cl⁻</td>
<td>[Fe₄S₄]⁺</td>
<td>4.62 (5)</td>
<td>4.85 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe₄S₄Cl⁺</td>
<td>[Fe₄S₃]⁺</td>
<td>4.23 (5)</td>
<td>4.42 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe₄S₄Br⁻</td>
<td>[Fe₄S₃]⁺</td>
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<td>4.83 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>[Fe₄S₄]⁺</td>
<td>4.23 (5)</td>
<td>4.41 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>[Fe₄S₅]⁺</td>
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<td>4.08 (6)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>[Fe₄S₆]⁺</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fe₄S₆Br⁻</td>
<td>[Fe₄S₆]⁺</td>
<td>3.03 (10)</td>
<td>3.23 (6)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<sup>a</sup> Numbers in parentheses represent experimental uncertainties in the last two digits.

<sup>b</sup> Also represent the adiabatic electron affinities of the corresponding charged complexes.

Figure 2. Photoelectron spectra of Fe₄S₅⁻ at 266 and 193 nm. The 193 nm spectrum of Fe₄S₅⁻ is compared with those of Fe₄S₄⁻ and Fe₄S₆⁻. The labels “d” indicate features from detachment of Fe 3d electrons, and “S” denotes features derived from S 3p derived molecular orbitals. See text for details.

The spectra of Fe₄S₄Cl⁻ displayed three features, labeled as d and S, as well as an intense band at 6.2 eV (Figure 3c). The d band had a relatively weak intensity and yielded a rather high ADE (4.62 eV) for Fe₄S₄Cl⁻. The spectra of Fe₄S₄Cl⁻ shifted to lower binding energies with an intense band labeled as S, which is similar to that in the spectra of Fe₄S₄Br⁻⁻. There are two weaker features at the lower binding energy side, labeled as d. The separation between the first d band and the S band is almost identical to that in the spectra of Fe₄S₄Cl⁻⁻. With the exception of the extra d band in Fe₄S₄Cl⁻⁻, the overall PES spectral patterns of the two Fe₄S₄Cl⁻⁻ complexes are similar and they both also show some similarity to the spectra of the doubly charged [Fe₄S₄Cl]²⁻ complex that we recently reported. The ADEs for the first d band and the VDEs for all the d and S bands are given in Table 1.

3.3. Fe₄S₅Br⁻⁻ (n = 2–4). For the Br-ligated complexes, two CID products (Fe₄S₄Br₃⁻ and Fe₄S₄Br₄⁻) were observed under our experimental conditions. The PES spectra of Fe₄S₄Br₆⁻⁻ (n = 2–4) at 193 and 157 nm are shown in Figure 4. The spectra of Fe₄S₄Br₃⁻ and Fe₄S₄Br₄⁻ are nearly identical to those of the corresponding Cl-ligated complexes (Figure 3). The spectra of Fe₄S₄Br₃⁻ shifted further to lower binding energies. The S band is similar to that in the spectra of Fe₄S₄Br₃⁻, but the lower binding energy part of the Fe₄S₄Br₄⁻ spectra seemed to be more complicated with unresolved bands, although only one band
was labeled. Again, the observed ADEs and VDEs are given in Table 1.

3.4. \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{n}\) \((n = 0\rightarrow 4)\). For the I-ligated cubane, the loss of all the ligands down to the bare \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-}\) core was observed in the CID owing to the relatively weaker Fe–I bond. This series of complexes gave us the most systematic and complete data set, as shown in Figure 5. As \( n \) decreases, we observed that the spectra systematically shift to lower binding energies. For \( n = 4, 3, 2, 1 \) and 0, more d bands were observed at the lower binding energy side. Two were discernible in the spectra of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{4} \) and three in those of the bare \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-}\). Although the higher binding energy side of the \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-} \) spectra showed some difference, the spectra of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-} \) follow the general trend of the \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{n} \) series, suggesting that the cubane core survived the CID processes and maintained a similar structure as that in the \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{n} \) complexes. The ADEs and VDEs for the d and S bands of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{n} \) are also given in Table 1.

3.5. Comparison of the PES Spectra of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{n}^{-} \) \((n = 4\rightarrow 6)\) Produced from the Laser Vaporization and Electrospray Sources. In contrast to the intensive investigations on the \([4\text{Fe}–4\text{S}]\) active sites in proteins and the cubane \([4\text{Fe}–4\text{S}]\) cores in analogue complexes,\(^{15–23}\) little is known about the bare \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-} \)-cluster.\(^{24,25}\) An interesting question concerns its ground state structure. Does it also possess a cubane-type structure?

![Figure 4](image4.png)

**Figure 4.** Photoelectron spectra of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{Br}^{-} \) \((n = 2\rightarrow 4)\) at 193 and 157 nm. See Figure 2 cation for the labels “d” and “S”.

![Figure 5](image5.png)

**Figure 5.** Photoelectron spectra of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{n} \) \((n = 0\rightarrow 4)\) at 193 and 157 nm. See Figure 2 cation for the labels “d” and “S”.

We were able to generate this cluster from both our laser vaporization and electrospray sources. The ion formation process is completely different in the two ion sources. In laser vaporization, clusters are formed through aggregation of atoms, and in general the lowest energy structures are produced.\(^{26}\) On the other hand, the \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-} \) clusters were formed by successive loss of the I ligands from \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{4} \) through CID in the electrospray source. It was expected the cubane structure to be maintained, regardless if it is the lowest energy structure. The similarity and systematic trend in the complete data set shown in Figure 5 suggested that the cubane structure was intact in \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}\text{I}^{n} \) produced by CID. Figure 6a and 6b compare the PES spectra of \( \text{Fe}_{5}\text{S}_{4}^{-} \) produced from the two ion sources. They are essentially identical, except that the spectrum from the CID product was broader. The latter was due to the fact that the CID products were relatively hot with high internal energies, which could not be effectively cooled during the ion transport.


\(^{(23)}\) Harris, S. *Polyhedron* 1989, 8, 2843.


and trapping. On the other hand, in the laser vaporization source the supersonic expansion provided moderate cooling and in general produces cluster anions with vibrational temperatures slightly below room temperature. Thus, the identity of the PES spectra of FeS\(^{4-}\) from two totally different formation processes indicated that the bare Fe\(_4\)S\(_4\) cluster indeed possesses a cubane-like structure, probably not too different from that in the Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) complexes.

We were also able to produce the FeS\(^{5-}\) and FeS\(^{6-}\) clusters from CID of [Fe\(_4\)S\(_4\)(SC\(_2\)H\(_5\))\(_4\)]\(^{2-}\) from our electrospray ion source. The PES data of these CID products are also compared to the data of the same species produced from laser vaporization in Figure 6. These two sets of data are again identical, except that the PES spectra from the CID products were broader analogous to the case of FeS\(^{4-}\). The FeS\(^{5-}\) and FeS\(^{6-}\) CID products were formed by losing three and two \(\text{SC}_2\text{H}_5\) ligands and one and two \(\text{C}_2\text{H}_5\) units through \(\text{S} \rightarrow \text{C}\) bond scission in the \(\text{SC}_2\text{H}_5\) ligand from a singly charged Fe\(_4\)S\(_4\)(SC\(_2\)H\(_5\))\(_3\) complex, respectively. The cubane core was expected to be intact in FeS\(^{5-}\) and FeS\(^{6-}\) from the CID, as in the FeS\(^{4-}\) CID product from Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)\(^{4-}\). Therefore, the identity of the PES spectra of FeS\(^{5-}\) and FeS\(^{6-}\) produced from the two ion sources suggested that the ground state structures of these two clusters indeed contain an Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\) cubane core and the extra S atoms can be considered as terminal ligands to the Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\) core.

4. Discussion

4.1. PES Spectra of Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) and Fe\(_3\)S\(_5\)\(^{4-}\) and the “Inverted Level Scheme” for the Cubane Core. In a recent study, we investigated the electronic structure of a series of doubly charged [Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)]\(^{2+}\) analogue complexes with L = Cl, Br, I, SC\(_2\)H\(_5\), and SH. The PES data showed similar spectral patterns with each other and confirmed the “inverted level scheme” for the [Fe\(_4\)S\(_4\)]\(^{3+}\) cubane and Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) complexes. Therefore, our PES data of the singly charged Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) complexes, there is only one minority-spin electron. The detachment of this electron gave rise to the weak d band in the PES spectra of Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)\(^{4-}\), as summarized in Figure 8a–c for L = Cl, Br, I. The second PES band (S) corresponds to detachment primarily from S-based MOs. We noted that the PES pattern of the Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) singly charged species are very similar to those of the corresponding doubly charged [Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)]\(^{2+}\) complexes, except that the binding energy of the singly charged species is much higher due to the absence of the intramolecular coulomb repulsion present in the doubly charged anions. The relative intensity of the first band is weaker in the PES spectra of the singly charged species than that observed for the doubly charged anions because this feature corresponds to only one minority-spin electron in the singly charged complexes. Therefore, our PES data of the singly charged Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) complexes with a [4Fe–4S]\(^{3+}\) oxidation state is consistent with the inverted level scheme shown in Figure 7a. All these complexes should have a spin of 1/2, due to the presence of the single minority-spin electron.

The PES spectrum of FeS\(^{5-}\) is compared to those of Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)\(^{4-}\) in Figure 8. As discussed above, this cluster is expected to have a cubane core with a [4Fe–4S]\(^{3+}\) oxidation state. Although the spacing of the first two features in the PES spectrum of FeS\(^{5-}\) (Figure 8d) is much smaller, their relative intensities are similar to that in the spectra of Fe\(_3\)S\(_4\)L\(_4\)\(^{4-}\). Thus, the weak low binding energy feature (d), which appeared as a shoulder, should correspond to the single minority-spin electron.


in the [4Fe–4S]$^{3+}$ cubane core and the intense band (S) should correspond to S-based MOs (Figure 8d). Thus, the electronic structure of Fe$_4$S$_6$$^{2-}$ can also be described by the inverted level scheme with a spin of $\frac{1}{2}$, similar to the Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_4$$^{2-}$ complexes. The two extra S atoms most likely coordinate each to two Fe atoms in the two sublayers of the cubane core. The smaller d–S band spacing and the different spectral pattern in the higher binding energy part in the spectrum of Fe$_4$S$_6$$^{2-}$ are due to the difference between the S ligand and the halogen ligands. We noted that the d–S band spacing decreases slightly from Fe$_4$S$_4$Cl$_4$$^{2-}$ to Fe$_4$S$_4$I$_4$$^{2-}$, as the terminal ligand becomes less electron-withdrawing from Cl to I. Sulfur as a divalent terminal ligand should be even less electron-withdrawing relative to I, and the smaller d–S spacing in Fe$_4$S$_6$$^{2-}$ is consistent with this trend.

4.2. PES Spectra of Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_3$$^{2-}$ (L = Cl, Br, I) and the Effects of the Partial Coordination on the Electronic Structure of the Cubane. The partially coordinated Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_3$$^{2-}$ complexes contain a cubane core with a [4Fe–4S]$^{3+}$ oxidation state, which is similar to that in the [Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_4$$^{2-}$]$^{2+}$ doubly charged complexes. However, in Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_3$$^{2-}$ the two sublayers are no longer equivalent due to the absence of one ligand. This asymmetry should induce a splitting in the minority-spin levels, which are no longer equivalent energetically. The minority-spin level (the HOMO of [Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_4$$^{2-}$]) involves Fe–Fe bonding interactions and Fe–L antibonding interactions within each [2Fe–2S] sublayer.$^{10,28}$ It is expected that the minority-spin level in the sublayer with only one ligand should be even less electron-withdrawing relative to I, and the smaller d–S spacing in Fe$_4$S$_6$$^{2-}$ is consistent with this trend.

Figure 8. Comparison of photoelectron spectra of all species with a [Fe$_4$S$_4$]$^{3+}$ core.

Figure 9. Comparison of photoelectron spectra of all species with a [Fe$_4$S$_4$]$^{2+}$ core.

The PES spectrum of Fe$_4$S$_5$$^{2-}$ is compared to those of Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_2$$^{2-}$ in Figure 10. The low binding energy part of the Fe$_4$S$_5$$^{2-}$ spectrum was much better resolved with two well-defined d bands. The extra S should coordinate to two Fe atoms in the [4Fe–4S]$^{4+}$ core, defining one sublayer. The three minority spins may distribute similarly as in Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_3$$^{2-}$ with two minority spins in the layer that is not coordinated by the fifth S atom, giving rise to a spin $\frac{1}{2}$ state for Fe$_4$S$_5$$^{2-}$. The first d band in the PES spectrum of Fe$_4$S$_5$$^{2-}$ then came from detachment of the highest occupied minority-spin electron. Dependent on the
magnitude of the splitting between the two sublayers, either a spin 0 or a spin $\frac{1}{2}$ state can result for the ground state of neutral Fe$_4$S$_4$.

4.4. Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ and Fe$_4$S$_4$$^+$. Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ should contain a [4Fe−4S]$^0$ cubane core with four minority spins and all Fe are in the ferrous state. Thus each sublayer of the cubane core should have two minority-spin electrons, resulting in a spin 0 state for Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$.

However, the two sublayers are inequivalent, which can result in a splitting of the minority-spin levels in the two sublayers, similar to the case in the Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_3$$^-$ complexes. This splitting was evident in the PES spectra of Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ (Figure 5d and 5i). If the two sublayers were equivalent, two d bands would be expected with similar intensities. The low binding energy part of the PES spectra of Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ was complicated, indicating more transitions were congested in this part of the spectrum and giving direct evidence for the splitting in the minority-spin levels due to the asymmetry of the coordination environment in Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$.

The all-ferrous [4Fe−4S]$^0$ center of the Fe protein from Azotobacter vinelandii has been shown to have a spin state of $S = 4$ on the basis of Mössbauer and EPR studies. One Fe site was shown to be unique presumably due to environmental or geometric asymmetries in the protein. This suggests that the two-layer model of the cubane as shown in Figure 7a is no longer applicable for the all-ferrous cubane.

The Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ complex may be considered the simplest model system for the all-ferrous center because the single I ligand generates a unique Fe site naturally. Unfortunately, the current PES data are not sufficient to distinguish between the different spin states considered for the all-ferrous centers in the recent theoretical study. Further theoretical study on the Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ complex as a model for the all-ferrous [4Fe−4S]$^0$ center would be highly desirable.

There should be five minority spins in the bare Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ cluster. They should fill three levels in one sublayer and two in the other sublayer, according to the inverted level scheme of Figure 7a. This would result in a spin $\frac{1}{2}$ state for Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$.

Detachment from the highest occupied minority spin level gave rise to the X band in the PES spectra (Figure 1) and resulted in a spin 0 state for the ground state of neutral Fe$_4$S$_4$. Detachment from the other occupied minority spin levels would lead to either a spin 0 or spin $\frac{1}{2}$ excited state for neutral Fe$_4$S$_4$. If the splitting between these spin states is small relative to our spectral resolution (~30 meV in the relevant spectral range of Figure 1a), only one PES band would result. This indeed appeared to be the case, since only three well-resolved d bands (X, A, B) were observed in the PES spectra of Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ (Figure 1). Thus, our PES data suggested that the inverted level scheme devised for the cubane core is also applicable to describe the electronic structure of the bare Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ and Fe$_4$S$_4$Fe clusters.

4.5. Electron Storage and Sequential Oxidation of the [4Fe−4S]$^0$ Cubane Cluster. Fe has two common oxidation states: Fe$^{2+}$ and Fe$^{3+}$, which are cycled in redox reactions involving Fe. The strong spin polarization stabilizes the d$^5$ majority spins and destabilizes the single minority spin in the d$^0$ electron configuration of Fe$^{2+}$, making the Fe$^{2+}$/Fe$^{3+}$ redox couple one of the most favorite in chemistry and biochemistry. The redox capability of all Fe–S clusters and proteins relies on this redox couple. In the cubane, the four Fe centers can store up to four minority-spin electrons in the all-ferrous [4Fe−4S]$^0$ oxidation states. In principle, all of these four electrons are available for electron-transfer reactions, leading to the all-ferric [4Fe−4S]$^{4+}$ oxidation state and giving the cubane cluster an extraordinary capacity for electron storage.

It is noteworthy that the bare Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ cluster possesses a cubane-type structure and its electronic structure can be described by the inverted level scheme (Figure 7a). This proves the stability of the cubane structural feature and provides further support for its robustness as a modular functional unit in analogue complexes and proteins. The fact that the bare Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ cluster possesses a cubane-type structure makes it possible for us to access the wide range of oxidation states of the cubane core in the gas phase. A recent density functional study investigated all five oxidation states of the analogue complex [Fe$_4$S$_4$(SCH$_3$)$_4$]$^{n-}$ ($n = 0$–4). However, only the $n = 1$ and 2 species were accessible in the gas phase, because the species with $n > 2$ would not be stable as gaseous species due to the strong intramolecular coulomb repulsion. The current investigation takes advantage of the variable terminal ligands to access a wide range of oxidation states for the cubane core all in the form of singly charged anions. Our recent study dealt with the doubly charged analogue complexes [Fe$_4$S$_4$L$_4$$^{2+}$], which all contain a [4Fe−4S]$^{2+}$ cubane core.

The Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ cluster in fact has five minority spins, even though this oxidation state is not accessible in either analogue complexes or proteins. In Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$, two minority-spin electrons are transferred from the cubane core to the extra S, resulting in a [4Fe−4S]$^{1+}$ oxidation state with three minority spins. In Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$, a [4Fe−4S]$^{3+}$ oxidation is achieved. Thus from Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$ to Fe$_4$S$_4$I$^-$, a sequential oxidation of the cubane core is observed, and the
electron binding energies of the clusters also increase with the number of extra S ligands (Figure 2). Although the partially coordinated halogen complexes, Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻, were produced from the fully coordinated Fe₄S₄L₄⁻, the series of species can also be viewed as a sequential oxidation of the cubane core from the bare Fe₄S₄⁻ cluster because the core oxidation state increases by one with each additional halogen ligand in Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻. In the case of Fe₄S₄Iₙ⁻, a full range of oxidation states of the cubane core is accessed from [4Fe₄-S₄]⁻ → [4Fe₄-S₄]⁰ → [4Fe₄-S₄]¹⁺ → [4Fe₄-S₄]₂⁺ → [4Fe₄-S₄]₃⁺ with n = 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. The number of minority-spin electrons decreases from 5 → 4 → 3 → 2 → 1 along the same sequence.

Figure 11 displays the ADEs of the threshold d band in the four series of Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻ species with respect to the formal oxidation states of the [4Fe₄-S₄] cubane core. The ADEs represent the gas-phase oxidation potential of the corresponding complexes and increase in each series with the oxidation states of the cubane core. For the [4Fe₄-S₄]³⁺ core, the ADEs are extremely high, suggesting that it is much more difficult to oxidize the cubane core to the all-ferric form [4Fe₄-S₄]⁴⁺. The terminal ligands also have significant influences on the ADEs of the cubane complexes with the order S < I ≈ Br ≈ Cl. We observed that the extra S leads to a 1.18 eV increase of ADE in Fe₄S₃⁻ relative to that in Fe₄S₂⁻. This is almost twice as large an increase as the effect of two iodine atoms (Figure 11). This observation is consistent with the divalent nature of the extra S as terminal ligands in Fe₄S₅⁻.

5. Conclusions

We report a photoelectron spectroscopic investigation of the electronic structure of the [4Fe₄-S₄] cubane core with variable terminal coordination and oxidation states. Bare Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) clusters and synthetic analogue complexes Fe₄S₄Lₙ⁻ (L = Cl, Br, I; n = 1–4) were produced by laser vaporization and electrospray ionization with CID and characterized by photoelectron spectroscopy. Photoelectron spectra of Fe₄S₄⁻ (n = 4–6) produced from laser vaporization and CID confirmed that they all possess cubane-type structures with the extra S in Fe₄S₅⁻ and Fe₄S₆⁻ acting as terminal ligands to the cubane core. We found that the electronic structures of both the Fe₄S₄⁻ and Fe₄S₅Lₙ⁻ species can be described by the two-layer inverted level scheme. Five oxidation states of the cubane core, [4Fe₄-S₄]⁻ → [4Fe₄-S₄]⁰ → [4Fe₄-S₄]¹⁺ → [4Fe₄-S₄]₂⁺ → [4Fe₄-S₄]₃⁺, were accessed by varying the terminal ligand numbers. Spectral features due to the detachment of the minority-spin Fe 3d electrons were observed at the lowest binding energies and were readily recognized. Such 3d features decrease as the number of terminal ligands increases, i.e., the increase of the core oxidation states or the decrease of the number of minority electrons, revealing a behavior of sequential oxidation of the cubane core. Experimental evidence of the bare Fe₄S₄⁻ cluster possessing the cubane-type structure proves the stability of the cubane structural unit. The behavior of sequential oxidation further confirms the electron-storage capability of the cubane core and its robustness as nature’s favorite electron-transfer center.

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