Electrochemical performance of KTiOAsO₄ (KTA) in potassium-ion batteries from density-functional theory


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(Received 8 August 2022; accepted 19 September 2022; published 31 October 2022)

The electrochemical performance of potassium titanyl arsenate (KTiOAsO₄, KTA) as the cathode and anode in K-ion batteries is calculated within density-functional theory. Cathodes and anodes are modeled using K-deficient KₓTiOAsO₄ (x = 0.0–1.0) and K-doped KTiOAsO₄Kₓ (x = 0.0–0.5), respectively. For KTA cathodes/anodes a slightly larger/smaller open circuit voltage is found than predicted for potassium titanyl phosphate. The present results suggest that a solely KTA-based K-ion battery can reach an average working voltage of about 3.8 V. The migration barriers of K vacancies and K dopants are found to be smaller than 750 meV. In addition, the present calculations show a very moderate volume expansion and shrinkage upon K intercalation and deintercalation. Our results suggest KTA to be a promising electrode material for K-ion batteries.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevMaterials.6.105401

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing effort to replace fossil fuels by renewable energies such as solar, tidal, or wind energy. This is accompanied by the need for efficient energy storage. Li-ion batteries (LIBs) combine good charging efficiencies with high-energy densities and low self-discharge rates [1–3]. In addition, under special conditions, they are rechargeable several thousand charging cycles without any significant deterioration [4]. Still, there is an ongoing search for alternative technologies [5–10]. In this context, Na-ion (NIB) and K-ion (KIB) batteries appear as promising candidates [6,11–16]. Both alkali metals show similar chemical properties as Li. However, due to their larger ionic radii, new electrode materials have to be explored.

Potassium titanyl phosphate (KTiOPO₄, KTP) has been suggested as an excellent material as both a cathode [9] and anode [10,17–19]. In the cathode material, K vacancies are generated during operation, and Ti-Ti coordinated O atoms near the vacancy oxidize [9]. The application as an anode requires the intercalation of additional K atoms, which causes the reduction of Ti atoms [10]. However, upon reduction of Ti atoms in the vicinity of O vacancies, KTP is known to be affected by the so-called gray tracking [20–22]. Gray tracks are a characteristic material damage, which forms for example upon exposure to intense light or electric fields and manifests itself by dark spots in the crystal. Their formation is accompanied by an increased absorption for laser light at 532 and 1064 nm [23–27]. However, this phenomenon may also be detrimental for battery applications: The Ti³⁺ centers instrumental for the gray tracks’ formation are thermally stable [20], and electrons are likely to be trapped by Ti atoms in the vicinity of O vacancies rather than far from them [21]. Thus, they may affect the electron flux.

This suggests to study further members of the KTP-type crystal family with promising electrochemical properties [5,18,28–34]. In particular, potassium titanyl arsenate (KTA, KTiOAsO₄) is interesting in this context, as it is more robust against the formation of gray tracks than KTP [35]. The crystal is already well established in (non)linear optics. In fact, the material features, e.g., high chemical and thermally stabilities as well as high nonlinear optical coefficients, good conversion efficiencies, a broad transparency range, and a high ionic conductivity [36–39]. Its large band gap [40], however, will require material processing, e.g., coating with electroconductive carbon, in order to realize sufficient electrode conductivity [10,41].

In the present paper we use density-functional theory calculations in order to test the suitability of KTA as a cathode and anode for potassium-ion batteries (KIBs).

II. COMPUTATIONAL DETAILS

The density-functional-theory (DFT) calculations are performed using the open-source Quantum ESPRESSO package [42,43]. The electron-ion interactions are modeled via norm-conserving pseudopotentials, treating Ti 3s² 3p³ 3d⁴ 4s¹, As 4s² 4p³, K 4s¹, and O 2s² 2p⁴ states as valence electrons. The electron exchange and correlation (XC) is described within the generalized gradient approximation (GGA) using the revised Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof functional PBEsol [44].

The current study reports on the electrochemical performance of KTA, KTiOAsO₄, as the cathode and anode material in potassium-ion batteries. Theoretical calculations within the density-functional theory framework reveal promising electrochemical properties for KTA, particularly in terms of open circuit voltage and migration barriers for potassium ions. The study advances the understanding of potassium-ion battery materials and highlights KTA as a potential candidate for future battery technologies.

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DFT calculations using (semi)local functionals are known to systematically underestimate redox voltages. A better description can be achieved by applying hybrid functionals, which provide quantitatively correct voltages [45]. Unfortunately, hybrid DFT is too expensive to be routinely applied to a large number of complex structures. The Hubbard correction scheme, however, provides reliable intercalation voltages and anionic oxidation [45,46–50] at a much lower computational cost. This methodology has been applied in the present work. In detail, we followed the approach by Cococcioni and de Gironcoli [51] and used a Hubbard correction of $U = 5.8$ eV for the Ti 3$d$ states. This value has been determined self-consistently by adding a small positive and a small negative shift on each nonequivalent Hubbard site and by computing the variation of the occupation of all sites in the potential shift on each nonequivalent Hubbard site and by consistently adding a small positive and a small negative

tuations and residual forces are below $10^{-8}$ V atom with hybrid PBE0 [52] calculations. The calculated

corrected KTA unit cell with one deintercalated K atom with hybrid PBE0 [52] calculations. The calculated

where positive and negative signs refer to cathode and anode materials, respectively, $F$ is the Faraday constant, and $z$ is the transferred charge [10,56–61]. Note that the Gibbs’ free energy refers to reactions (1) and (2) and their explicit directions. In the present calculations, temperature and volume effects are neglected and the Gibbs’ free-energy changes are approximated by $\Delta G \approx \Delta E$ with $\Delta E$ as the internal energy. Thus Eq. (3) reads

$$\nabla \approx \pm \frac{\Delta E}{zF}. \quad (4)$$

$$\nabla \approx \pm \frac{\Delta E}{zF} = \frac{E_{(de)} \in \text{e}}{e_0 F}, \quad (5)$$

with $e_0$ as the elementary charge and $E_{(de)} \in \text{e} = \Delta E/x$ as the K (de)intercalation energy (also see Secs. III A and IV A).

In order to guarantee a robust long-term operation, electrodes should not suffer from strong deformations upon K-ion intercalation or deintercalation. Based on the energetics of

FIG. 1. Electron charge density (yellow isosurface) in the vicinity of the negatively charged $V_{K}^{-}$ (a) and neutral vacancy $V_{K}^{0}$ (b). The Ti-Ti coordinated O atom $(O_{n,Ti})$ oxidizes subsequent to excess electron removal.

FIG. 2. Formation energy $E_{f}$ vs the concentration $x$ of deintercalated K. The red line (i.e., the convex hull) connects all stable ordered phases.
FIG. 3. Electronic orbitals of the midgap defect levels and electronic DOS of the most stable $K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4$ configurations calculated here. The position of the Fermi level is indicated, too.

the K excess and deficiency material, the average volume expansion or shrinkage is computed here assuming a Boltzmann distribution of the defect structures that realize a specific stoichiometry.

Finally, the gravimetric capacity $C$ of the electrodes [10] is determined from

$$C = \frac{xF}{M_x},$$

where $M_x$ is the molar mass of one formula unit of $K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4$ ($KTiOAsO_4K_x$) and $F$ the Faraday constant.

FIG. 4. Average voltage (a) and volume reduction (b) of $K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4$ with $x = 0.125–1$.

III. CATHODE MATERIAL

A. Models

In order to model KTA as a cathode material, K-deficient $K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4$ ($x = 0.125–1$) is considered by deintercalating up to 8 K ions from the unit cell. Similar to KTP, the deintercalation of a neutral K atom is accompanied by the formation of a hole at the valence band maximum (VBM) [62]. Therefore, in thermodynamic equilibrium, K vacancies are energetically stable only in the charge state $-1$. The extra charge is mainly trapped by one of the Ti-Ti coordinated O atoms (OTi-Ti) near the vacancy [see Fig. 1(a)]. For the computational modeling of $V_{K}^{-1}$ we proceed in two steps: First, the geometry of the negatively charged vacancy $V_{K}^{-1}$ is optimized. Second, the excess electron is removed and the structure is relaxed again. In order to simulate noninteracting defects, spin-polarized calculations are performed, where the total spin angular momentum is $S = \frac{1}{2}$. Here, $n = 1–8$ corresponds to the number of deintercalated K atoms in the unit cell. This method allows for an accurate description of the oxidation of the nearest Ti-Ti coordinated O atom [also see Fig. 1(a) versus Fig. 1(b)]. There are 256 possible configurations. Some of them, however, are related by symmetry. The stable configurations are determined here from a convex hull construction [9,63]. Here, the formation
energy $E_f$,  
\[ E_f = E_{K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4} - (1 - x) \cdot E_{KTiOAsO_4} - x \cdot E_{TiOAsO_4}, \]  
(7)
is considered, where $E_{K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4}$ is the total energy of $K_{1-x}TiOAsO_4$, and $E_{KTiOAsO_4}$ and $E_{TiOAsO_4}$ refer to the respective energies of stoichiometric $KTiOAsO_4$ and $TiOAsO_4$ per formula unit. The so calculated values are compiled in Fig. 2. The convex hull corresponds to the red line, which connects the lowest-energy ordered phases. The phases with formation energy above this curve are unstable with respect to a mixed-phase system composed of the structures which delimit the start and the end point of the underlying tie line. As can be seen, at zero temperature only the vacancy concentrations $x = 0.00, 0.25, 0.50,$ and $1.00$ correspond to stable phase. However, the energy deviations of the phases with $x = 0.125, 0.750,$ and $0.875$ from the convex hull are small, below $10 \text{ meV}$. Therefore, these phases can be expected to be realized at finite temperatures due to entropy effects. On the other hand, for $0.25 < x < 0.50$ and $0.50 < x < 0.75$ phase separation may occur.

The energetically most favorable vacancy configurations together with the corresponding electronic density of states (DOS) for all stoichiometries considered are shown in Fig. 3. Obviously, the K deintercalation does not have a strong influence on the atomic structural of the $TiOAsO_4$ matrix. In fact, it is essentially preserved. However, the K atoms that remain in the matrix rearrange. Even if all K atoms are deintercalated, only a negligible distortion in conjunction with a volume...
shrinkage below 7% is calculated [see Fig. 4(b)]. The volume shrinkage calculated here for KTA is larger than the 1.5% predicted for KTP [9], but below the value 7.8% predicted for KVPO4F [9].

The electronic DOS shown in Fig. 3 demonstrates that the K deintercalation gives rise to O 2p defect states in the band gap, which originate from two distinct O atoms near the vacancy. One of these O atoms, more precisely the one coordinated to two Ti atoms (ΟTi-Ti in Fig. 1), is slightly oxidized. The defect levels are partially occupied or totally empty depending on the vacancy configuration.

The K deintercalation energy $E_{\text{dein}}$ of each computed structure has been calculated via [9]

$$E_{\text{dein}} = \frac{E_{\text{K_{1-x}TiOAsO}_4} - E_{\text{K\text{TiOAsO}_4}} + x \cdot E_K}{x}, \quad (8)$$

where $E_K = -0.82$ eV is the energy of a K atom in metallic K. We find that for the removal of each K atom a deintercalation energy between 4.5 and 4.8 eV has to be applied to the system. This value is of the same order of magnitude, albeit slightly larger that calculated for KTP (between about 4.2 and 4.6 eV) [9]. A positive deintercalation energy implies that energy has to be applied to the system in order to create the vacancy, corresponding to battery charging.

In Fig. 4(a) the average voltage based on all K$_{1-x}$TiOAsO$_4$ structures considered for a specific K-vacancy concentration $x$ is shown depending on the stoichiometry. The average voltage rises steadily with the concentration $x$. It assumes values between 4.47 V for $x = 0.125$ and 4.80 V for $x = 1$, i.e., when all K are removed from the cell. Due to the higher molar mass of As compared to P, KTA shows a lower gravimetric capacity than P. The capacity of the latter can reach 168.73 mAh g$^{-1}$ when all the K atoms are removed from the cell [9], the maximum capacity of KTA amounts to 132.17 mAh g$^{-1}$. As a consequence, the gravimetric energy density of KTA is lower than that of KTP, but it is very close to that of KVPO4F, i.e., 634.57 Wh/kg, 774.46 Wh/kg [9], and 664.68 Wh/kg [9], respectively.

**B. K-vacancy diffusion**

Besides a high (or rather low) average voltage and high capacity, a good electrode should feature low diffusion barriers to facilitate ion (de)intercalation. In order to investigate the vacancy diffusion mechanisms, we perform NEB calculations along the $a$ and $c$ direction of the crystal. In KTP family member compounds, the diffusion along the $b$ axis was found to be unfavorable [5]. Therefore, this pathway was discarded here. We explore the migration of a single K vacancy (i.e., $x = 0.125$) along two different pathways along the $a$ axis and four different pathways along the $c$ axis of the material. The energy barriers together with a schematic representation of the chosen pathways are shown in Fig. 5. All paths are characterized by relatively low activation energies between 0.19 and 0.73 eV. Although these values are slightly higher than the activation energies of the Rb$^+$ migration in RbVPO$_4$F [5], and those reported for KTP [9], they are still low enough to guarantee a fast K deintercalation. The fact that the activation energy for vacancy diffusion is locally smaller for migration in the $-a$ and $-c$ directions than in the opposite direction is related to the intrinsic polarization of the crystal. In addition, we find that the optimal diffusion pathway corresponds to the anticlockwise spiral pathway along the $-c$ axis, i.e., K(2) $\rightarrow$ K(5) $\rightarrow$ K(6) $\rightarrow$ K(1) $\rightarrow$ K(2), i.e., pathway (e) in Fig. 5, which is characterized by activation energies lower than 0.33 eV.

**IV. ANODE MATERIAL**

**A. Models**

Modeling KTA as an anode material requires the intercalation of K atoms. In the case of KTP, eight different intercalations sites were identified [10]. These sites have been probed here for KTA. The AsO$_4$ tetrahedra in KTA, however, are larger than the corresponding PO$_4$ units in KTP. This renders the intercalation in the KTP intercalation sites unfavorable and reduces the number of potential K positions to the four sites shown in Fig. 6. These correspond to the intercalation sites M1–M4 shown in Ref. [9] shifted along the $-b$ direction by about 25% of the lattice parameter. Consequently, we simulate KTiOAsO$_4$K$_n$ here for the range $x = 0.125$–0.5, where $x$ is the number of intercalated K per formula unit. All 15 possible combinations of intercalations sites have been simulated. In analogy to the cathode calculations, neutral interstitials have to be considered. The total spin angular momentum was set to $S = \frac{n}{2}$, where $n = 1$–4 corresponds to the number of intercalated K atoms per unit cell.

The intercalation of each K atom causes the reduction of a Ti$^{4+}$ into Ti$^{3+}$ in its vicinity. This can be seen (i) from the formation of occupied midgap Ti-3d defect levels, and (ii) from the defect levels’ contribution to the wave function to the...
charge density (see Fig. 6). Note that in Fig. 6 only the energetically most favorable configuration for each concentration is shown.

The intercalation energy $E_{\text{in}}$ associated with the K intercalation is obtained as [64]

$$E_{\text{in}} = \frac{E_{\text{KTiOAsO}_4K_x} - E_{\text{KTiOAsO}_4} - x \cdot E_K}{x},$$

where $E_{\text{KTiOAsO}_4K_x}$ is the energy of a formula unit of KTiOAsO$_4$K$_x$. As $x$ increases, the intercalation energy per K interstitial varies between $-0.8$ and $-0.2$ eV. It is always negative, i.e., K atoms will spontaneously intercalate in the anode.

The average voltage and volume expansion of the four different concentrations $x$ of intercalated K are shown in Figs. 7(a) and 7(b), respectively. As the concentration of intercalated K increases, both the average voltage and the volume expansion with respect to pristine KTA increase. The former varies between 0.83 and 0.90 V, the latter between 1.41% and 6.89%. Thus, KTA shows a slightly lower average voltage and a similar volume expansion as KTP [10] after the intercalation of the same amount of K. Regarding the gravimetric capacity, we calculate values between 51.26 mAh g$^{-1}$ (i.e., for $x = 0.5$) leading to gravimetric energy densities between 11.32 and 46.37 Wh/kg. Again, due to the higher molar mass of As compared to P, the capacity of KTA is lower than that of KTP (between 16.52 and 61.61 mAh g$^{-1}$ for the same concentration of intercalated K) [10].

### B. K-ion diffusion

In the previous section it was shown that the electrochemical properties of KTA are comparable to those of KTP. Next, we compare the K-ion diffusion in KTA and KTP. We perform NEB calculations to investigate the diffusion mechanisms of a single K$_i$.

Due to the peculiar positioning of the K interstitials within the crystal lattice, a direct K-ion migration along the $a$ axis is hindered by the TiO$_6$PO$_4$ chains. Thus, these pathways will not be considered here. For the computation of the migration along the $b$ axis, the KTiOAsO$_4$K$_{0.125}$ unit cell has to be...
doubled along this direction. In fact, the K ion migrates from one intercalation site into the equivalent position of an adjacent cell. Surprisingly, despite the large channel, we found a rather unfavorable activation energy of 1.91 eV.

Regarding the ion migration along the c axis, we simulate four different pathways (see Fig. 8). Along every pathway, the K, migrates through the cell between intercalation and intrinsic lattice sites. The activation energies for ion migration do not depend on the direction one path is traversed. We find that the energy barriers of different paths are very close in energy (all below 0.76 eV). Note that this values are smaller than those found for the K-ion migration in KTP crystals along the a axis [10]. The optimal diffusion pathway is again the one corresponding to the anticlockwise spiral along the c axis [11]. The optimal diffusion pathway is again the one corresponding to the anticlockwise spiral along the c axis [11], the equivalent position of an adjacent cell.

We found that KTA combines a high average working voltage (about 3.8 V) with a relatively small volume deformation, at least for moderate concentrations of K vacancies (intercalated K). Moreover, also the gravimetric energy densities of the material are in the same order of those of other members of the KTP-type crystal family. In addition, the dynamics of the K-vacancy (K-ion) migration computed via NEB calculations revealed that both mechanisms are characterized by low activation energies for all studied diffusion pathways.

The present results suggest that KTA may be a promising material to be used as a cathode as well as an anode in K-ion batteries. A KIB design in which both electrodes are composed of KTA could reach working voltages up to 4.0 V.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the performance of KTA as both the cathode and anode for K-ion batteries has been systematically studied using density-functional theory.