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Nobelium: Tracer Chemistry of the Divalent and Trivalent Ions

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## Ernest O. Lawrence Radiation Laboratory

NOBELIUM: TRACER CHEMISTRY  
OF THE DIVALENT AND TRIVALENT IONS

Jaromir Maly, Torbjorn Sikkeland,  
Robert Silva, and Albert Ghiorso

February 1968

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Jaromir Maly, Torbjorn Sikkeland, Robert Silva, and Albert Ghiorso

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NOBELIUM: TRACER CHEMISTRY OF THE DIVALENT AND TRIVALENT IONS (1)

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Abstract In the absence of oxidizing or reducing agents the chromatographic and coprecipitation behavior of element 102 is similar to that of the alkaline earth elements. After oxidation with ceric ions, the behavior is that expected of a trivalent actinide. Our conclusion is that nobelium is the first actinide for which the +2 oxidation state is the most stable species in aqueous solution.

### Introduction

Results of the first attempts (3) and other more recent efforts (4) to study the chemistry of element 102 suggested the chemical behavior of nobelium to be that of a +3 actinide element. On the other hand, new results indicated an increasing tendency toward formation of +2 states with increasing Z by the heavy actinides (5) and this was confirmed by the discovery of the  $Md^{+2}$  ion (6,7). These results suggested that nobelium might exhibit a fairly stable divalent state in addition to the expected trivalent state.

The recent discovery of  $^{255}No$ , with an alpha half-life and decay energy of approximately 3 minutes and 8.1 MeV (8,9,10), has made it possible to carry out tracer chemistry on element 102 (11). The short half-life and low yield of  $^{255}No$  atoms per experiment compelled us to modify and develop fast chemical procedures so that the total time necessary for separation, chemical study and preparation of a source suitable for alpha energy analysis would be less than 10 minutes. These procedures included chromatographic methods for the study of single-atom behavior and one-step coprecipitation reactions. As only a few  $^{255}No$  decays were observed per experiment, it was necessary to repeat each set of experiments 10-20 times in order to obtain statistically significant results.

### Experimental Procedures and Results

#### a. Production and Identification

The  $^{255}No$  was produced by irradiating a  $0.8 \text{ mg/cm}^2$ -thick plutonium target supported by a 1-mil thick Be foil with  $^{16}O$  ions from the Berkeley HILAC. The isotopic composition of the target in atom percent was  $^{244}Pu$  - 74.21,  $^{242}Pu$  - 25.32,  $^{241}Pu$  - 0.094,  $^{240}Pu$  - 0.312,  $^{239}Pu$  - 0.064 and  $^{238}Pu$  - 0.002. The beam current was 2-4  $\mu$ amps over an area of  $0.2 \text{ cm}^2$ . The nobelium atoms

recoiling from the target were stopped in He gas and transferred to a platinum catcher foil by gas jet as described elsewhere (9,12). The maximum yield was obtained at an oxygen-ion energy of approximately 97 MeV as expected for the  $^{244}\text{Pu}(^{16}\text{O},5n)^{255}\text{No}$  reaction. The average number of countable atoms at 50% geometry on the catcher foil at the beginning of the chemical operations was determined, from 36 measurements, to be  $6.0 \pm 0.5 \alpha \text{ cts}/\mu\text{amp}$  of beam.

The  $^{255}\text{No}$  was identified by its alpha decay energy. The alpha spectrum is known to be complex and there is good indication of more than one alpha group spread over energies of 7.7 to 8.25 MeV. A composite decay curve of this energy range was constructed from 36 measurements and gave a half-life of  $3.6 \pm 0.5$  minutes. Subportions of the main alpha spectrum gave half-lives in general agreement with the composite value so all alphas from 7.7 to 8.25 MeV in energy were assumed to come from  $^{255}\text{No}$ .

b. Electrodeposition

The first evidence of unexpected behavior for No was found during cathodic electrodeposition experiments using standard procedures (13). In these experiments the No atoms were washed from the catcher foil with a saturated  $\text{NH}_4\text{Cl}$  plating solution containing tracer quantities of the radioactive elements to be compared with the No. During plating the pH is very high near the cathode and tracers are known to be deposited in approximately inverse proportion to the solubility of their hydroxides. In Table 1 is shown the percent of tracers and nobelium that were plated (14). Also shown is the number of  $^{255}\text{No}$  alpha decays observed per number of decays expected. The latter was computed for each experiment from the average number of countable atoms given above by allowing for decay during the chemical operations. As



shown in Table 1, No is plated with a low yield similar to Ra rather than a high yield as are the +3 actinides, Th and Pa suggesting a hydroxide solubility akin to the former rather than the latter elements.

c. Chloride Volatility

In these experiments the volatility of nobelium chloride was compared to the volatility of tracer quantities of Pa, Am, Th, Pb and Ra by heating the platinum catcher foil to  $\sim 1000^{\circ}\text{C}$  with a Bunsen flame after conversion to the chlorides by evaporation to dryness with HCl. The results in Table 1 indicate that nobelium does not exhibit an unusually volatile chloride as does Pb.

d. Cation Exchange Column

Our attempts to elute No from a heated ( $80^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), Dowex 50x12 ion exchange resin column with ammonium alpha-hydroxyisobutyrate in the predicted preeinsteinium elution position (15) were unsuccessful. The procedure was to first elute the tracer +3 actinide ions with Z higher than Am with 8 drops of dilute eluting solution (0.3M, pH 4.0) and then to elute Am and several lower Z elements (Pb, Sr, Ra, Ac and Ce) with 8 drops of concentrated eluting solution (1.9M, pH 4.8). The results given in Table 2 clearly show that No was not eluted before Am.

An elution position for No relative to tracer quantities of Y, Sr, Ra and Ra was obtained for a heated ( $80^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), 0.2 cm diameter by 2 cm long column using the concentrated eluting solution. The composite result for 13 experiments is presented in Fig. 1. The results show that under these conditions nobelium does not exhibit the slightest resemblance to the +3 actinides, for in similar tracer experiments, Es, Cm, Am and Ac were eluted in the Y position which is

promptly after the first free column volume. This was also the case for Th, Pa, Pb and Ce. The elution of No near the Sr position strengthened our growing suspicion that No was exhibiting a +2 valence.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to oxidize the suspected  $\text{No}^{+2}$  to  $\text{No}^{+3}$  and elute it from the ion exchange column in the predicted +3 position, but when rapid oxidizing agents such as  $\text{Ce}^{+4}$  were present in sufficiently dilute concentrations/as not to effect the column operation, they were immediately reduced by the hot butyrate solution.

e. Fluoride Behavior

For the study of the coprecipitation behavior of No fluoride, we used the residue adsorption technique (16,17). A drop of 0.1M HCl containing the tracers to which No was to be compared plus ~ 5 $\mu\text{g}$  each of the various charge-state carriers Ba, La and Zr was used to dissolve the No atoms from the catcher foil. Two drops of 40% HF were added to convert to the fluorides and taken to dryness. The plate was then washed with  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  several times and both residue plate and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  washes were alpha energy analyzed. The results are given in Table 2 and suggest that the solubility of No fluoride is more like  $\text{BaF}_2$  than  $\text{LaF}_3$ .

Assuming that the nobelium was exhibiting a +2 valence under the above conditions, attempts were made to oxidize the  $\text{No}^{+2}$  to  $\text{No}^{+3}$  which should form a less soluble fluoride. The procedure was the same as described above except the oxidant, ceric nitrate, was substituted for the Zr. As seen in Table 2, after oxidation with  $\text{Ce}^{+4}$  the distribution was in favor of the  $\text{LaF}_3$  phase.

The behavior of No fluoride after oxidation appears to be better explained by the formation of  $\text{NoF}_3$  rather than  $\text{NoF}_4$ . Under these dilute

conditions,  $CeF_4$  was found to have a high solubility. If it were formed,  $NoF_4$  might be expected to be as soluble as  $CeF_4$  and  $ZrF_4$ .

#### f. Sulfate Behavior

Recent work has shown that  $^{90}Y$  can be separated from  $^{90}Sr$  at room temperature by elution from a  $SrSO_4$  column using  $0.5N H_2SO_4$  (18). In general it appears that the more soluble sulfates are eluted before the less soluble ones. We used a similar column for the study of the behavior of nobelium sulfate. In each experiment the No, tracer activities to which No was to be compared, and  $\sim 5\mu g$  each of Zr and La were converted to the sulfate form on the platinum catcher foil by evaporation to dryness with  $1N H_2SO_4$ . The mass of Zr and La added was the same as the mass of  $Ce^{+4}$  and  $Ce^{+3}$  used in later oxidation experiments in order to duplicate the mass effects on the column. The No and other elements were washed from the foil with  $6N H_2SO_4$  and transferred to the 0.2 cm dia. x 1 cm long  $SrSO_4$  column and the elution carried out with  $6N H_2SO_4$ . Time and counter limitations made the elution in fractions rather than dropwise necessary. The results are given in Table 2 and show No to be more strongly adsorbed on the column than Es and Am.

Similar experiments were carried out under oxidizing conditions using  $Ce^{+4}$  and the results given in Table 2. In these experiments, the No was eluted with Es and before Am. This apparent change in solubility of nobelium sulfate is consistent with a change in valence state from +2 to +3.

#### Discussion

The results presented in this work indicate a very interesting behavior by nobelium when compared to other elements of the actinide family.

Under the conditions of our experiments, nobelium exhibited the following properties relative to the other heavy actinides in their +3 state:

- 1) Its hydroxide or hydrous oxide has a high solubility.
- 2) Its fluoride has a high solubility.
- 3) Its sulfate has a low solubility.
- 4) Nobelium did not elute from a Dowex 50x12 ion exchange column with ammonium  $\alpha$ -hydroxisobutyrate in the position predicted for the +3 ion. In fact, No was eluted near  $\text{Sr}^{+2}$  and about the same position as  $\text{Ca}^{+2}$  under conditions where all other actinides were eluted immediately. This behavior shows that previous claims that No is eluted in the pre-Es position must be in error (3).
- 5) Though No chloride exhibits a low volatility, probably in the range of the +3 actinides, we do not agree with the generalization made in Ref. 19 that the chemical behavior of nobelium is similar to +3 actinides.
- 6) In two types of experiments, fluoride coprecipitation and sulfate column, there were strong indications that nobelium was oxidized by  $\text{Ce}^{+4}$  to a form where it behaved like a trivalent heavy actinide ( $\text{Ce}^{+3} - \text{Ce}^{+4}$  couple  $\sim -1.5$  volts).

We feel that the best interpretation of our results is that the divalent ion is the most stable species for nobelium in aqueous solution and thus it exhibits a substantially different chemical behavior from the other actinides. This would appear to confirm the prediction made by Seaborg in 1949 (20) of a possible stable +2 state for element 102 due to the special stability of the  $5f^{14}$  electronic configuration.

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Table 1. Results of Electrodeposition (A) and Chloride Volatility (B) Experiments.

Experiment	Percent in Fraction							Observed/Expected Counts of Ho
	$^{253}\text{Es}$	$^{243}\text{Am}$	$^{231}\text{Pa}$	$^{227}\text{Th}$	$^{211}\text{Pb}$	$^{223}\text{Ra}$	$^{255}\text{No}$	
A	43	48	86	77	--	4	4±2	2/76
B	--	76	100	82	23	87	88±31	14/17

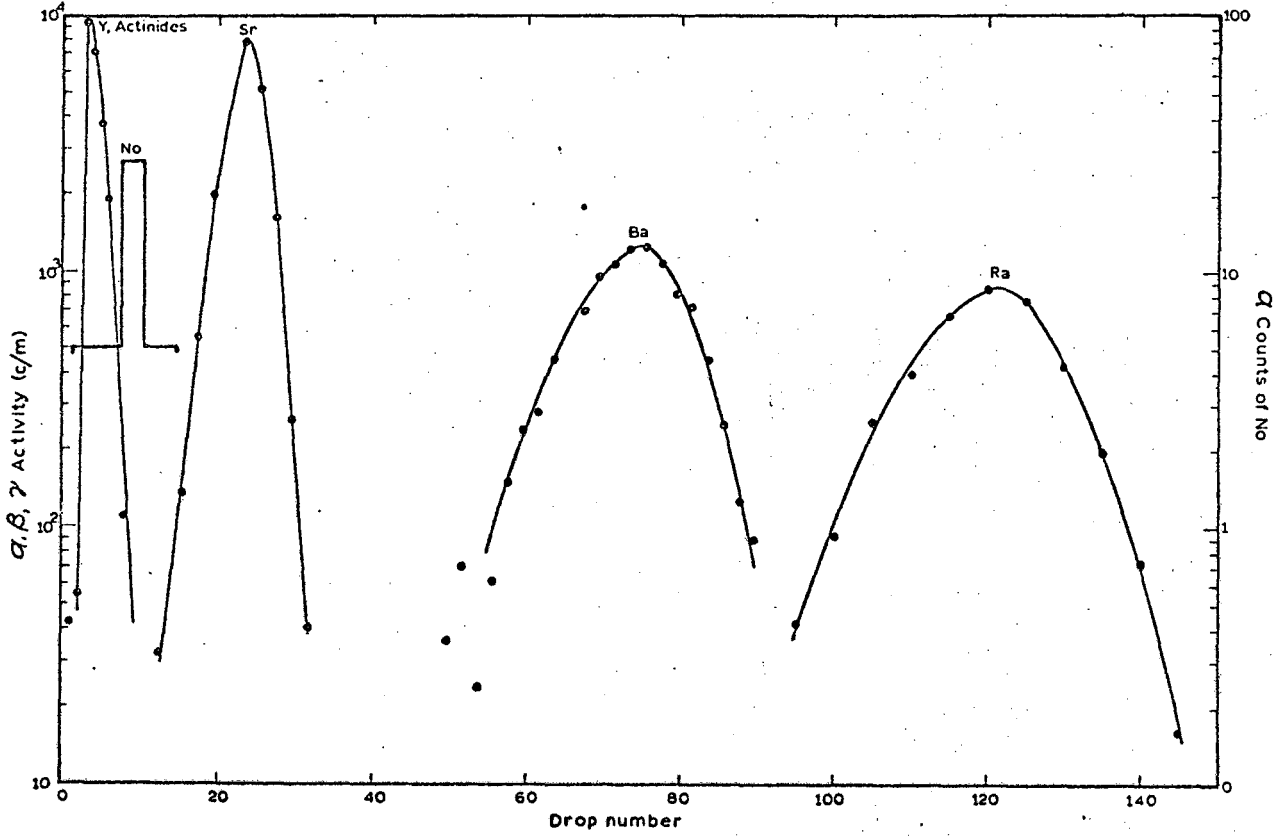
Table 2. Results of Elution from Cation Exchange Column with ammonium  $\alpha$ -hydroxisobutyrate (A), Fluoride Coprecipitation with La and Ba Carrier (B), and Elution from  $\text{SrSO}_4$  column with  $6\text{N H}_2\text{SO}_4$  (C).

Experiment -Fraction	Oxidizing Conditions	Percent in Fraction					Observed/Expected Counts of No
		$^{253}\text{Es}$	$^{243}\text{Am}$	$^{223}\text{Ra}$	$^{133}\text{Ba}$	$^{255}\text{No}$	
A { 0.3M 1.9M	no	43	6	<0.1	--	2±1	1/113
	oxidation	0	59	<0.1	--	65±12	52/80
B { LaF <sub>3</sub> BaF <sub>2</sub> LaF <sub>3</sub> BaF <sub>2</sub>	no	--	60	15	13	7±3	6/98
	oxidation	--	11	37	44	56±10	48/87
	Ce <sup>+4</sup>	--	34	18	23	48±8	63/134
	oxidation	--	17	33	31	31±6	35/117
C { Drop No. 1-10 11-22 1-10 11-22 1-7 8-17 18-27	no	38	10	< 1	--	2±1	1/122
	oxidation	5	36			13±4	9/75
	Ce <sup>+4</sup>	47	3	< 1	--	61±15	27/44
	oxidation	3	28			3±3	0/34
	Ce <sup>+4</sup>	33	16		--	41±10	23/57
	oxidation	7	29	< 1		13±6	5/45
		2	2			3±3	1/35
							"



Figure Caption

Fig. 1 Elution of nobelium from a heated ( $80^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), Dowex 50x12 cation exchange column with 1.9M, pH 4.8 ammonium  $\alpha$ -hydroxyisobutyrate.



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Fig. 1

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