AN OVERVIEW OF NANOLIME AS A CONSOLIDATION METHOD

FOR CALCAREOUS SUBSTRATES

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ABSTRACT

Ca(OH)₂ particles with submicrometric dimensions (nanolimes) represent one of the most promising consolidants

for the conservation of calcareous substrates. The nanolime treatment is similar to the limewater technique,

traditionally used for its durability and high compatibility with the calcareous matrix but requiring a large number of

applications and not always yielding a highly effective consolidation. Since 2001, alcohol-based dispersions of

Ca(OH)₂ nanoparticles have been synthesised to overcome the limitations of the limewater treatment. Nanolimes

present the same high compatibility and durability of the traditional technique but superior properties in terms of

higher consolidation, penetration and reactivity, and fewer side effects. Since their discovery, nanolimes have been

investigated by several research groups with the aim of refining their synthesis process, properties and applications.

This paper presents an overview of the most relevant literature about nanolime as a consolidant for calcareous

substrates.

Key words: Nanolime; Calcium hydroxide; Consolidation; Lime-water; Conservation; Nanoparticles; Synthesis;

Calcareous substrates.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent development of nanoscience and nanotechnology has opened the way to new applications in

many scientific fields, including that of the conservation of cultural heritage. One example of a

nanomaterial developed over the last decades is the so-called "nanolime", nanoscale particles of Ca(OH)₂,

with potentially superior consolidation properties compared to traditional lime-based treatments. So far,

nanolime has been studied mainly within the built cultural heritage conservation field.

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Scientific investigations on nanolime began around the year 2000 at the University of Florence [Consorzio Interuniversitario per lo Sviluppo dei Sistemi a Grande Interfase (CSGI) or Center for Colloid and Surface Science], in Italy, with the first results on its synthesis and application for the conservation of wall-paintings published in 2001 (Ambrosi et al. 2001). The researchers in Florence modified the synthesis methodology several times by reactions in diols (Salvadori and Dei 2001), aqueous solutions (Ambrosi et al. 2001) or water-in-oil (w/o) micro-emulsions (Nanni and Dei 2003). In 2003, other research group (Ziegenbalg 2003) prepared nanolime from a heterogeneous-phase reaction, which was patented under the brand name Calosil®. Calosil® was the first nanolime product introduced in the market in 2006 (IBZ-Salzchemie GmbH & Co. KG) followed by Nanorestore® (CSGI) in 2008. With these products made available to the scientific community, several research groups in Europe began investigating the properties and consolidation efficacy of nanolime. Three main EU research projects, STONECORE (2008 - 2011), NANOMATCH (2011 - 2014) and NanoforART (2012 - 2015) have made significant contributions to understanding the technologies and preparing the way for a range of applications of nanolime in the conservation field.

Nanolime is used mainly to recover the cohesion between particles in calcareous substrates such as wall-paintings, limestone, lime mortar, etc. For decades during the past, organic and inorganic consolidants have been used for the consolidation of these substrates. The use of organic consolidants such as acrylic, epoxy, or vinyl resins has been very common in restoration treatments since 1960 (Dei and Salvadori 2006). However, the low compatibility with the substrate and poor aging and durability of these treatments may cause unwanted degradation processes, including cracking and aesthetic changes, and may interfere with future treatments. In contrast, inorganic-based consolidants such as barium hydroxide and limewater have a high physico-chemical compatibility with the substrate and good durability, although their use requires a large number of applications and the consolidation is not always highly effective. The effectiveness of the traditional limewater technique, transmitted from generation to generation of practitioners, has been controversial. Price's research (Price et al. 1988) concluded that the limewater technique does not produce a noticeable consolidation as most of the lime is deposited within the outer

2mm and the low amount of particles does not produce consolidating effect. Nevertheless, another research (Brajer and Kalsbeek 1999) demonstrated that a prolonged and uninterrupted application of limewater over 80 days produces a positive consolidation effect. However, this treatment is tedious and has to be repeated up to 40 times due to the low solubility of calcium hydroxide in water (1.7 g/L⁻¹ at 20°C). Other limitations are the reduced penetration depth of the lime size-particles and the possible decay processes associated with the use of large amounts of limewater solution (salt movement, etc.). The use of nanolime in alcohol allows incorporation of larger amounts of lime into the treated substrate with far less water, yielding better penetration and faster carbonation (Ambrosi et al. 2001). This paper expands on exiting work (Otero et al. 2017) and reviews the considerable literature produced.

2. SYNTHESIS

Nanoparticles can be produced through either the top-down or bottom-up processes. In the top-down method the nanoparticles are created by "breaking" a bulk micro-scale particle until fragments in the nanometer range are obtained. This normally involves using a source of high energy in processes such as laser ablation, thermal decomposition or mechanical milling. In the bottom-up method, the nanoparticles are built atom by atom by chemical precipitation using several techniques for the deposition and crystal growth from vapour (Chemical Vapour Condensation (CVC)) and hydrogen plasma-metal reaction (HPMR) and liquid phases (micro-emulsions, solvo-thermal, etc.). Most calcium hydroxide nanoparticles are synthesized through the bottom-up reaction by chemical precipitation from a liquid phase.

A survey of different synthesis methods from literature is summarized in Table 1. In 1997, colloidal dispersions of calcium hydroxide in organic solvents were obtained (Delfort 1997) and, in 2000, CSGI-group (Giorgi et al. 2000) also obtained stable alcohol dispersions of Ca(OH)₂ particles. Both researchers found that dispersions in alcohol are much more stable and able to incorporate larger amounts of particles than limewater. With the aim of preparing stable nanoparticles of Ca(OH)₂, the researchers at CSGI carried out a series of studies based on the works of Matijevic group (Pe et al. 1998) in the field of colloids synthesis. They reported that nucleation of nanoscale particles is affected by reaction time, high temperature (above 100°C) and high degree of super saturation, and it can be achieved with slow

synthesis and peptization processes. In 2001, CSGI group (Dei and Giorgi 2001) obtained Ca(OH)₂ particles (1-2µm) by a hydrolytic method at medium-high temperature (60°C) and super-saturation. In order to reduce the size of particles, they synthesized calcium hydroxide nanoparticles (30-60 nm) from diols, which allowed higher temperatures to be reached during the process (Salvadori and Dei 2001). However, this synthesis method proved to be time consuming and produced a low quantity of nanoparticles. In the same year, they successfully obtained highly reactive and colloidal sub-micrometer Ca(OH)₂ particles (±300nm) via an homogeneous phase following the aqueous reaction CaCl₂ + 2NaOH → Ca(OH)₂ + 2NaCl, heated up to 90 °C under supersaturation conditions (Ambrosi et al. 2001). But, this process has drawbacks: 1) slow mixing rates; 2) the necessity of removing by-product NaCl by washing; 3) low yield of nanoparticles production. Ca(OH)₂ nanoparticles (2-10 nm) were also obtained using w/o micro-emulsions (Nanni and Dei 2003), but low yield and high production time make this method less practical. The synthesis method developed by CSGI (Dei and Giorgi 2001; Ambrosi et al. 2001; Dei and Salvadori 2006), which was commonly named "drop by drop method", was also adopted by several research groups with the aim of refining the synthesis process and properties (Sequeira et al. 2006; Daniele and Taglieri 2010; Daniele et al. 2008). In 2013, the Taglieri team (Daniele and Taglieri 2012) managed to reduce the synthesis time while decreasing the particle size (<50 nm) by adding a surfactant (Triton X-100) in the initial aqueous solution. In other synthesis pathways based on CSGI researches, Bhattacharya (Bhattacharya 2010) obtained nanolime by hydrolysing calcium nitrate tetrahydrate [Ca(NO₃)₂·4H₂O] as a precursor in diols at a high temperature (175°C) and Samanta (Samanta et al. 2016) synthesized nanolime using calcium nitrate dihydrate [(NO₃)₂·2H₂O] as a precursor in an aqueous medium at room temperature without requiring purification, obtaining nanoparticles of about 250 nm.

Other approaches for obtaining nanosized Ca(OH)₂ use calcium alkoxides as precursors (Ziegenbalg 2003; Poggi et al. 2016; Rodriguez-Navarro et al. 2013). Nanolime has been developed from a hydrogen plasma-metal reaction method (HPMR), obtaining low cost, high purity and crystalline particles (10-100nm) (Liu et al. 2010), and recently the Taglieri team (Taglieri et al. 2015) synthesised nanolime by means of an anion-exchange process using an anion-exchange resin (OH group), obtaining nanoparticles

with better features in terms of size, morphology and reactivity, and reducing the synthesis time by eliminating purification processes.

3. APPLICATIONS

During the last two decades nanolimes have been tested as conservation treatments for various substrates. Most of these studies focused on the pre-consolidation of wall paintings, limestone, lime mortars, renders and plasters; and on the de-acidification of cellulose-based materials such as paper, canvas and wood (Poggi et al. 2016).

The first evaluation of the performance of nanolime in a practical application was carried out on wall paintings by the researchers at CSGI (Ambrosi et al. 2001; Dei and Giorgi 2001). The use of lime dispersions in alcohol was first reported by Giorgi et al. (Giorgi et al. 2000), who obtained higher consolidation effect than with aqueous solutions and less superficial white glazing. Later, Ambrosi and co-workers, (Ambrosi et al. 2001, Dei and Giorgi 2001) successfully tested the first synthesized Ca(OH)₂ nanoparticles in lime mortar, limestone and wall-paintings, achieving good results and good re-adhesion of detached pigment flakes without side effects. After these preliminary works, the nanolime developed by the CSGI team was further tested on several Italian frescoes (Baglioni et al 2003, Baglioni and Giorgi 2006) as well as on limestone (Dei 2006) and on a wall-painting in the UNESCO World Heritage Archaeological Site of Calakmul (Baglioni et al. 2006) in Mexico, where a good degree of consolidation was achieved in few days under high relative humidity conditions. All work undertaken by CSGI between 2001 and 2006 reportedly achieved better superficial re-cohesion and quicker carbonation with fewer applications than traditional lime technique and without any aesthetic changes; thus demonstrating that nanolime is so far the best treatment for the consolidation of wall paintings.

The number of published reports on nanolime applications increased after 2008. Calosil® and Nanorestore® were tested by several research organizations and practitioners from various countries in Europe. One of the first studies about Calosil® (Drdácký et al. 2009) documented significant strength increase in lime mortar samples using many fewer applications than the traditional limewater method.

Other authors (Daniele et al. 2008; Campbell et al. 2011; Daniele and Taglieri 2011) investigated the consolidation and penetration of nanolime on limestones and lime mortars and found high superficial strengthening, although nanolime penetration only occurred within 200 µm-1 mm from the surface, depending on the porosity and degree of deterioration of the treated limestone (Ruffolo et al. 2014). These results highlight the importance of the material's pore structure in the effectiveness and penetration of the product. Other authors (Borsoi et al. 2012; Rodrigues 2012) observed insufficient nanolime penetration, no consolidation and nanolime migration back to the surface of the substrate in highly porous limestone, renders and very weak mortars. Afterwards, it was verified that this phenomenon occurs during evaporation of the solvent (Borsoi et al. 2015). The strength and penetrability of Calosil® products in plasters, lime mortars and wall paintings was also studied (Daehne and Herm 2013). It was found that the strength of lime mortar can be increased up to seven times when Calosil® E-25 is applied with cellulose ether gels (hydroxypropylcellulose gel) and that the addition of a low amount of Calosil®-Micro (contains calcium hydroxide particles with a size of 1-3 µm) enhances penetration and reduces back migration.

Treatments combining nanolime and other products were also studied. Based on the Ferroni-Dini method, the CSGI-team (Baglioni et al. 2003; Baglioni et al. 2006) used a combined treatment of barium hydroxide and nanolime for the treatment (desulphation and consolidation) of wall paintings affected by large amounts of sulphates. This combined application was improved later in 2010 (Giorgi et al. 2010) with nanoparticles of barium and calcium hydroxides. The combination of nanolime dispersions (CaLoSiL®) with silicic acid esters (SAE) can be used to enhance the affinity of SAE to a calcareous matrix (Piaszczynski and Wolf 2011). Photo-catalytic nanolime (Nuño et al. 2015) has been successfully used for self-cleaning coatings and environmental pollution control.

4. FACTORS INFLUENCING NANOLIME PERFORMANCE

There are several factors influencing the effectiveness of the application of nanolime for consolidation purposes: nanolime characteristics (concentration and type of solvent, particle size, morphology and

specific surface area), physical and mechanical characteristics of the substrate, extrinsic factors (RH, temperature, exposure time, CO₂ available) and the application method. Some of the published literature explains its efficacy as a consolidant.

It has been shown that nanolimes have superior consolidation properties to limewater, including higher, faster carbonation and greater penetration (Ambrosi et al. 2001; Dei and Giorgi 2001; Dei and Salvadori 2006). A short-chain alcohol dispersion provides the following benefits: 1) greater colloidal stability than suspensions in water (Dei and Giorgi 2001); 2) solvent evaporation so that higher concentrations of Ca(OH)₂ are attained (Giorgi et al. 2000); 3) higher amounts of lime (up to 30 times higher), result in an increased lime incorporation into the treated substrate, hence reducing the number of applications (Dei and Salvadori 2006); 4) enhancement of carbonation kinetics and CaCO₃ polymorph nucleation (Rodriguez-Navarro et al. 2013); 5) significant reduction of the amount of water introduced into the treated material, associated with undesirable effects, such as swelling clays, salt movement, etc. Nanoparticles in an alcohol dispersion penetrate better in porous structures and carbonate faster due to their higher specific surface area (Sequeira et al. 2006).

The role of the solvent for in-depth consolidation was studied recently (Borsoi et al. 2016). It was found that solvents with high boiling points improve the depth of nanolime deposition in stones with large pores (35–40 µm), while solvents with lower boiling points perform better in materials with finer pores (0.5-2 µm), which reduces nanolime migration back to the surface during the solvent drying. Comparison of different concentrations (5 and 25 g/L in isopropanol) of different products (Calosil®, Nanorestore® and Merck®) for the consolidation of lime mortars found that lower concentrations (Calosil® 5 g/L) yield the most significant improvement in the degree of carbonation in the pores (Arizzi et al. 2015). A percentage of residual water content in the alcohol medium (1:10 w/a ratio) clearly enhanced the carbonation process (Dei and Salvadori 2006; Daniele and Taglieri 2010). The colloidal behaviour of Ca(OH)₂ nanoparticles in alcohol was studied (Rodriguez-Navarro et al. 2013; Rodriguez-Navarro et al. 2016) and showed that, upon contact with alcohol, Ca(OH)₂ nanoparticles partially transform into Ca-

alkoxides via the reaction $Ca(OH)_2 + 2ROH \rightleftharpoons Ca(OR)_2 + 2H_2O$. The Ca-alkoxide conversion is time-dependent; therefore a long period of storage will produce higher conversion. The rate of carbonation of $Ca(OH)_2$ particles is reduced by such conversion, so that a freshly prepared alcohol dispersion should be preferred for a fast and effective consolidation. The influence of repeated applications (1 to 6) of Calosil® with different concentrations on high porosity stone showed that the appropriate amount of consolidant has to be chosen in relation to the stone porosity; the optimal treatment for stones with large pores ($\pm 48 \mu m$) seems to be 2 applications of Calosil® at 25 g/L concentration (Slizkova et al. 2012).

The mechanism of carbonation of nano-dispersions depends on extrinsic factors. Relative humidity, temperature, and exposure time strongly influence the carbonation kinetics and the precipitation of CaCO₃ polymorphs (López-Arce et al. 2010). It was shown that the nucleation of polymorphs varies as a function of RH and time, and the optimum carbonation rate is achieved at high RH (75-90% RH). The full carbonation may be achieved in 9-10 days at room temperature, ambient CO₂ concentration and high RH values (75%) (Baglioni et al. 2014). An important factor in the consolidation of porous substrates using nanolime is the availability of sufficient CO₂ in the pores of the treated material for the calcium hydroxide to fully carbonate. Some research groups investigated the possibility of increasing the amount of CO₂ in the pores of treated substrates. For example, the Taglieri team (Daniele et al. 2008) achieved full and faster carbonation by adding sodium bicarbonate (NaHCO₃) to the alcohol solution. However, the addition of NaHCO₃ may induce processes such as the formation of salt efflorescence. Other researchers (Lopez-Arce and Zornoza-Indart 2015) obtained good results and a full conversion in 21 days by creating a CO₂-rich atmosphere in a yeast-sugar environment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper gives an overview of the available literature about nanolime as a consolidant for calcareous substrates. From it there is no question that nanolime represents one of the most promising materials for the conservation of calcareous substrates because of its compatibility and minimal side effects. However, despite many years of research, it is clear that more technical and practical knowledge needs to be

acquired. The main conclusion is that whilst nanolime appears to be an effective consolidation treatment for superficial consolidation, when an in-depth consolidation is needed, as in the case of large portions of weathered porous substrates, the results vary significantly between materials. In-depth consolidation is influenced by several factors such as substrates' porous structure and nature, nanolime concentration, nature of solvent, RH, time, CO₂ exposure, additives, storage, application method, and number of applications. The interaction between all of these factors requires further study. Furthermore, the literature lacks data on the long-term performance of nanolime treated materials. The popularity of nanolime is growing and future investigations will hopefully contribute to addressing its current limitations.

6. AUTHOR'S CV

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Table 1. Brief summary of literature on the synthesis of nanolime

| Year | Research group | Synthesis | Inorganic precursor(s) | Synthesis media | Processing | T (°C) | PS (nm) |
|------|---------------------|-----------|---|------------------------------|--|--------|----------|
| | | route | | | | | |
| 2001 | CSGI group | CP-HS | CaCl ₂ and NaOH | aqueous | high T, wash. and pept. | 60 | 1-2 (µm) |
| 2001 | CSGI group | CP-HS | CaCl2·2H₂O and NaOH | diols | high T, filtration, wash. and pept. | 195 | 30-150 |
| 2001 | CSGI group | CP-HS | CaCl2·2H ₂ O and NaOH | aqueous | high T, wash. and pept. | 90 | 300 |
| 2003 | CSGI group | CP-HS | CaCl2·2H ₂ O and NaOH | w/o microemulsions | wash. and pept. | ≤ 15 | 2-10 |
| 2010 | Bhattacharya et al. | CP-HS | Ca(NO ₃) ₂ ·4H ₂ O and NaOH | diol (1,2-ethanediol) | hot vacuum filtration and pept. | 115 | 35 |
| 2010 | Liu et al. | CP-HPMR | melted Ca ingot and H₂O | H plasma | Ca vapour reacts O, CaO reacts with H ₂ O | room T | 10-100 |
| 2012 | Taglieri et al. | CP-HS | CaCl ₂ and NaOH | aqueous & Triton-X100 | wash. and pept. | 90 | <100 |
| 2015 | Taglieri et al. | CP-HS | CaCl ₂ ·2H ₂ O and AER (OH) | aqueous | pept. | room T | <100 |
| 2016 | Samanta et al. | CP-HS | Ca(NO ₃) ₂ ·2H ₂ O and NaOH | aqueous | pept. | room T | 350 |
| 2016 | CSGI group | CP-HPS | calcium metal | alcohol and H2O (high P & T) | high P reactor (High P & T) | 65-130 | 200 |

CP (chemical precipitation), HS (homogeneous synthesis), HPS (heterogeneous phase synthesis), HPMR (hydrogen plasma metal reaction), H (hydrogen), Ca (calcium, CaCl₂ (calcium chloride), NaOH (sodium hydroxide), w/o (water in oil), Ca(NO₃)₂·4H₂O (calcium nitrate tetrahydrate), CaO (calcium oxide), w/o (water in oil), P (pressure), T (temperature), PS (particle size), AER (anion exchange resin), wash (washing with deionized water), pept (peptization process)