

Biochemistry of Soil Organic Matter  
in Relation to Crop Production

Bundesforschungsanstalt  
für Landwirtschaft  
Braunschweig-Völkenrode (FAL)  
ZENTRALBÜCHEREI

91/300

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Lecture 5.

Physical Properties of Humic Substances

Optical Properties

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1. Absorption in ultraviolet and visible range of light.
  - 1.1 Principles of absorption spectroscopy of humic acids
  - 1.2 Connection between composition and light absorption of humic fractions.
    - 1.21 Contribution of phenols and their transformation products.
    - 1.22 Radicals.
    - 1.23 Heterocyclic ring systems.
2. Electronic spectra of humic acids.
  - 2.1 Influence of hydrogen ion concentration.
3. Determination of similarity degrees of humic substances by light absorption.
4. An example for the characterization of humic acids and their fractions by infrared absorption.
5. About the efficiency of optical methods for characterization of humic fractions.



From the physical properties of fractions of soil organic matter only some will be mentioned, which are supposed to be important more or less directly in connection with crop production. So for instance contributions to characterization of humic systems or their fractions in dependence of environmental conditions and soil management are very needed and of interest not only for soil chemistry and biochemistry but also for soil genesis and for agriculture.

1. Absorption in ultraviolet and visible range of light

The spectroscopic investigations of soil organic matter and its fractions in the ultraviolet and visible range of light has become more and more important for characterization and determination of genetic differences and also for transitions between the types of humic substances.

1.1 Principles of absorption spectroscopy of humic acids

The concentration used for the analysis was of about 0.01 - 0.05 mg/100ml. As chemical constitution is unknown the concentration can not be given in Mol/liter as in the case of chemical defined compounds. The absorption of humic substances in solution follows.

The Lambert-Beer law:

$$(\text{absorbance: } A = E = \log P_0/P = \epsilon \cdot c \cdot d)$$

The extinction coefficient  $K$  is  $K = \epsilon \cdot c$  if the length of the light path  $d$  in the cell is 1 cm. The extinction coefficient  $K$  is therefore

directly proportional to the concentration  $c$  (mg/100 ml) whereby the proportionality constant  $\mathcal{E}$  is specific for the investigated substance and is named molar extinction coefficient (molar absorptivity). As the value of  $\mathcal{E}$  is dependent upon the wavelength, the determination of concentration must be made at a defined wavelength. Owing to the still undetermined molar absorptivity of the humic substances, due to their unknown chemical constitution, the absolute concentration of humic acids in Mol/liter cannot be determined. Therefore the spectroscopic measurements of absorption of soil organic matter or its fractions are used only for the determination of the K-values.

The light absorption of a solution of humic substances of constant concentration is measured in the visible and ultraviolet range and the logarithm of extinction ( $\log K$ ) is plotted against the wavelength ( $\log K = (\lambda)_0$ ). In contrast to many higher molecular weight substances, the electronic spectra of humic fractions show no distinct maxima but only more or less monotonously raising straight lines in the direction of shorter wavelengths with a few deviations from linearity. On account of the applicability of the Lambert-Beer law, whereby  $\log \mathcal{E}$  and  $\log c$  became additive ( $\log K = \log \mathcal{E} + \log c$ ), spectra of solutions of the same humic substances measured at different concentrations are shifted parallel. The determination of relative concentrations by alterations of the absorbance are possible.

On the other hand this indicates that the slope of the curves is independent of variation in the concentration leading to the possibility



of characterization of the colour type of humic substances by determination of the slope of the absorption curve. This characterization is based on the differences of the molar absorptivity of these substances.

More recently some other authors such as KUMADA (1955) and SALFELD (1965, 1968) characterized the slope of the colour curve by the difference of logarithmic extinction of at least two different wavelengths ( $\Delta \log K = \log K_{400} - \log K_{600}$ ).

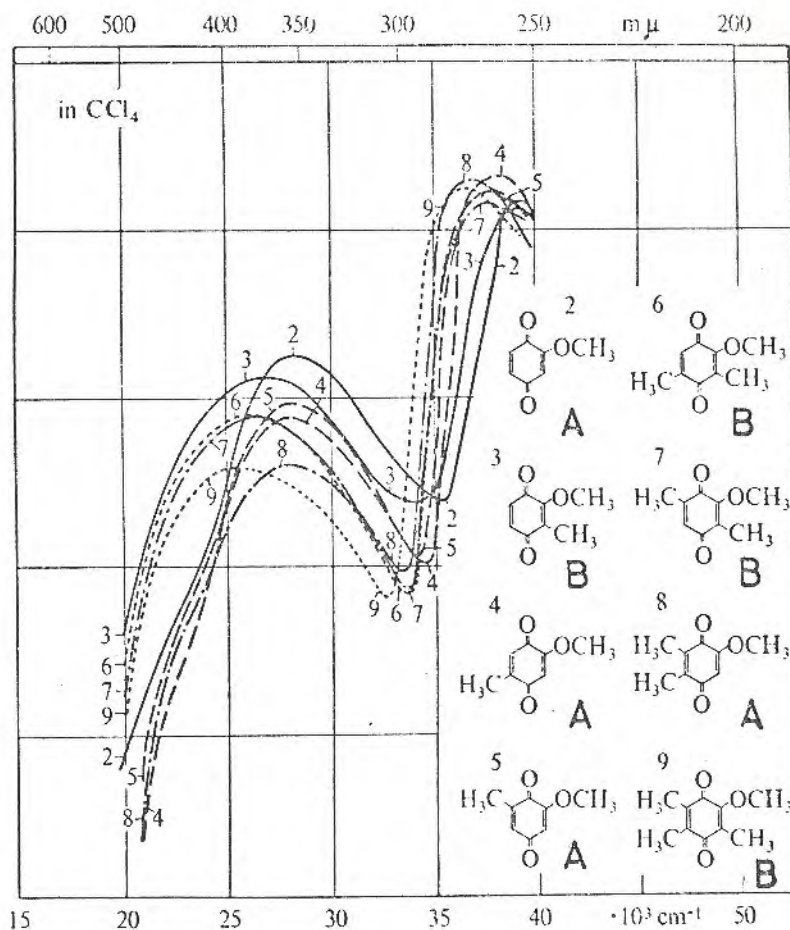
#### 1.2 Connection between composition and light absorption of humic acids.

The classification of humic acids with optical methods is the subject of many investigations. The spectroscopic and physico-chemical properties of the humic acids are primarily by the different genetic conditions in soils and are furthermore varied by the methods of extraction and purification.

The multitude of molecular constituents of humic acids, which absorb in the ultraviolet and visible range, such as phenolic compounds and their oxidation products, amino acids and their condensation products with phenols in oxidizing medium, and the formation of heterocyclic components, leads to spectra of mixtures. These show no strongly marked differences in the absorption properties, when different types of humic acids are compared.

#### 1.21 Contribution of phenols and their transformation products.

The absorption of humic acid in the ultraviolet range may be caused by phenolic components and in the visible by chromophoric groups formed by oxidation. It could be demonstrated by oxidative or reductive cleavage of humic acids, that these contain phenolic components (lecture 4).



**Fig. 1:** Absorption curves of methylated 2-methoxy-p-benzoquinone.  
 A: p-substitution (methoxyl group more effective than methyl group) .  
 B: o-substitution

FLAIG and SALFELD (1958) investigated especially the changes of the optical properties of differently substituted o- and p-benzoquinones as model substances. They demonstrated that the absorption curves of these compounds have two or three significant maxima according to their substitution. An o-substitution causes a stronger shift of the second maximum to longer wavelengths than a substitution in p-position. The kind and the position of the substituents cause changes of the absorption properties or shifts of specific absorption bands.



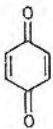
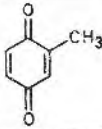


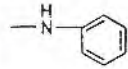
								
	2. maximum in nm	shift in nm	2. maximum m-,p- subst. in nm	shift in nm	2. maximum o- subst. in nm	shift in nm	2. maximum in nm	shift in nm
unsubstituted	282 (CCl <sub>4</sub> ) 288 (CHCl <sub>3</sub> )						375 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	
-CH <sub>3</sub>	309 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	27	310 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	1	332 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	23	328 (CCl <sub>4</sub> ) in 4-position	7 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )
-OCH <sub>3</sub>	351 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	69	355 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	46	374 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	65	450 (CCl <sub>4</sub> ) in 3-position	75 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )
-OH	369 (CHCl <sub>3</sub> ) 372 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	81 90	381 (CHCl <sub>3</sub> )	72	396 (CHCl <sub>3</sub> )	85	505 (CCl <sub>4</sub> ) in 3-position (3-hydroxy-4,6-di- tert. butyl)	116 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )
	369 (CCl <sub>4</sub> )	87						
	550 (CHCl <sub>3</sub> )	262 minus benzene ring -175						

Fig. 2: Shift of the second maximum of absorption curve of benzoquinones by substitution with different groups.

For instance substitution with an aliphatic group such as a methyl group results in a shift of the second maximum of p-benzoquinone at 282 nm (in carbon tetrachloride) for 27 nm, in the case of a methoxyl group for 69 nm and in the case of a hydroxyl group for 90 nm in direction of longer wavelengths.

Furthermore it could be established, that a shift of the second maximum to longer wavelengths depends less on the chain length of the aliphatic group, but much more on the kind of substitution at the ring with further alkyl-, alkoxyl- or hydroxyl groups. When the second substituent is on o-position to the other the shift is much larger, than by substitution in m- or p-position. It will be remembered that in the case of lignin degradation products and in the case of the transformations of microbial synthesized phenols there was often a substitution in o-position.



o-Benzoquinones absorb light at longer wavelengths than the p-benzoquinones. Substitution in 3-position has a greater effect on the shift than in 4-position. Strongly effective chromophoric groups are also phenyl as well as aromatic or aliphatic (amino acids) amino groups.

It is unlikely that all phenolic units in the molecule of humic acids are present in the form of quinones, because these are not very stable against further oxidation. If quinonoid groups are present to a larger extent, they would presumably effect a broad maximum in the absorption curve in a range between 300 to 500 nm. This is not observed; therefore other effects must exist.

### 1.22 Radicals

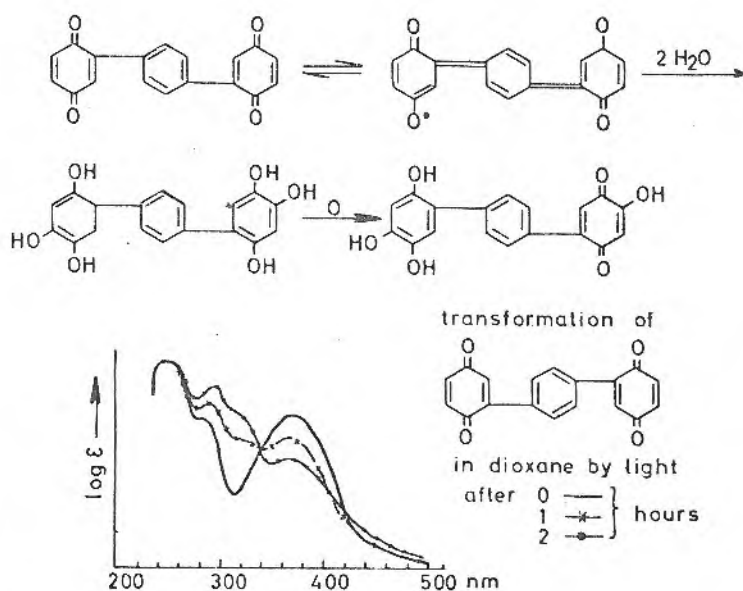


Fig. 3: Polymeric quinones as model substances of humic acids, 1,4-diquinonyl-benzene.

Some model experiments were made to explain the absence of distinct maxima in the absorption curve of humic acids. According to the

UV-spectrum 1,4-diquinonyl-benzene seems to be present in an o- and p-quinonoid configuration in solution (PLOETZ 1955). The o-configuration may be defined as a biradical and is very reactive. A corresponding hydroxylhydroquinone, which can be partially reoxidised to a hydroquinone, is formed by addition of water. A deeply coloured, intramolecular quinhydrone is formed. Diquinonyl-benzene is disproportionated in organic solvents. The formed mixture of substances show similar, nearly monoton increasing spectra as they are known from humic acids isolated from soils (FRÖMEL 1938 a,b, 1941 and later on many others).

STEELINK and TOLLIN (1962), STEELINK (1964) demonstrated by electron spin resonance, that humic acids contain radicals. This result agrees well with the assumption that the humic acids are intramolecular quinhydrones. Measurements by KLEIST and MÜCKE (1966), KLEIST (1967) established that the radicals (semiquinones) are stabilized by mesomery and are responsible for the colour of humic acids. Thereby, the humic acids would have the properties of electron exchanger. BAILEY, BRIGGS, LAWSON, SCRUTON and WARDS (1965) explain absorption in IR-spectra of browncoal humic acids by hydrogen bridge linkages between the hydrogen of phenolic hydroxyl groups and the carbonyl groups of quinones. Hitherto no quinone group could be found by reducing acetylarion (FARMER and MORRISON 1960). Otherwise MARTIN, DUBACH, MEHTA and DEUEL (1963) assume, that the carbonyl group of fulvic acids from podzol, which cannot be reduced by sodium boron hydride ( $\text{NaBH}_4$ ), may belong to quinone groups.



### 1.23 Heterocyclic ring systems.

A bathochromic effect may be caused by the oxygen, nitrogen or sulphur atoms in ring systems, which may occur in humic acids. The extent of a bathochromic effect of these elements is shown in the case of 4 dyestuffs with comparable chemical constitution.

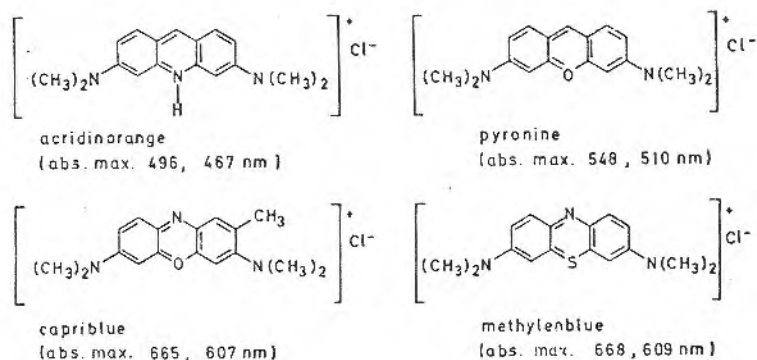


Fig. 4: Bathochromic effects of heteroatoms in dyestuffs with comparable chemical constitution.

The influence of the shift of the absorption maxima increases in order to nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur and corresponding combinations. The range of absorption of these compounds is at longer wavelengths than that of the mentioned benzoquinone compounds.

### 2. Electronic spectra of humic acids.

In the following figure the absorption spectra of different humic acids and of fulvic acids are depicted schematically. The curves of absorption are not linear, as could be shown by more exact measurements (comp. SALFELD 1965).

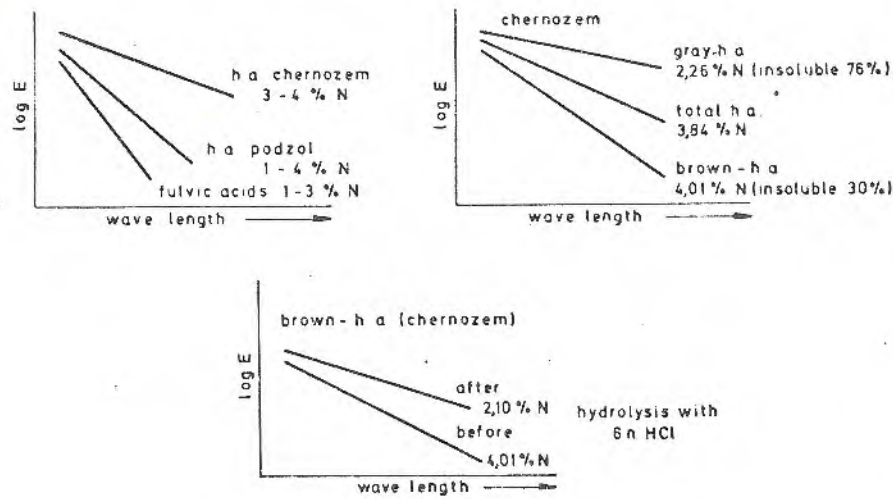


Fig. 5: Absorption spectra of humic acids from chernozem and podzol and fulvic acid (schematic).

As a rule, humic acids from chernozem rich in nitrogen have not only higher absorption, but also stronger absorption at longer wavelengths than the humic acids from podzols poor in nitrogen. The stronger absorption of humic acids from chernozems may be caused by the higher content of non-hydrolysable nitrogen, which may have a higher content of bathochromic heterocyclic compounds, than that in podzol humic acids. The total nitrogen content cannot play an important role in light absorption, since it is found largely in proteins, which do not absorb in the visible range.

The fraction of brown humic acids of chernozems has a higher nitrogen content than the fraction of gray humic acids. However, the absorption of the fraction of gray humic acids is stronger in the total range than that of the fraction of brown humic acids.



Therefore it may be that the residue of hydrolysis of the fraction of gray humic acids contains more heterocyclic, bathochromic components.

The absorption of the residue of hydrolysis of the fraction of brown humic acids is stronger in the total range than that of the fraction of the original brown humic acids, although the nitrogen content of this fraction (4.01 % N) is higher than that of the residue of hydrolysis (2.01 % N).

According to KLEIST and MÜCKE (1966) the higher extinction of the fraction of gray humic acids is due to a higher content of radicals, measured by electron spin resonance.

It seems that the absorption of fulvic acids is more due to oxidised phenols than to heterocyclic components with properties of dyestuffs, since these bathochromic components would show stronger absorption at longer wavelengths. The absorption of fulvic acids is less in the range of longer wavelengths. The nitrogen content of fulvic acids is generally lower (KONONOWA 1966) and the carbonyl content higher (SCHNITZER 1965) than that of humic acids.

There is voluminous literature on light absorption of humic substances. KUMADA (1965) and recently ORLOV and GRINDEL (1967) published summaries of work dealing with this problem.

The current theory concerning the colour of humic substances has been developed according to results of chemical investigations, but it must be supplemented by further investigations and isolation of corresponding compounds.

2.1 Influence of hydrogen ion concentration.

Since the investigations of SPRINGER (1934) and HOCK (1938) (a),(b) it is known, that the absorbance of humic substances in solution increases with decreasing hydrogen ion concentration.

SALFELD (1965) studied the influence of pH on the light absorption of humic acids purified by ion exchange from different origin. He found, that the decrease of the hydrogen ion concentration by addition of increasing amounts of 0.1 N NaOH up to pH =10 caused only a parallel shift of the spectra in direction to higher values of absorbance. A further decrease of the hydrogen ion concentration did not effect changes in the light absorption up to 500 nm. Above 500 nm a continuous increase of the absorbance up to 620 nm occurred, which led not only to the formation of a weak shoulder but also to a parallel shifting of the extinction values. A similar effect on the absorption spectrum was observed in the case of humic acids formed by autoxidation of pyrocatechol in sodium hydroxide solution.

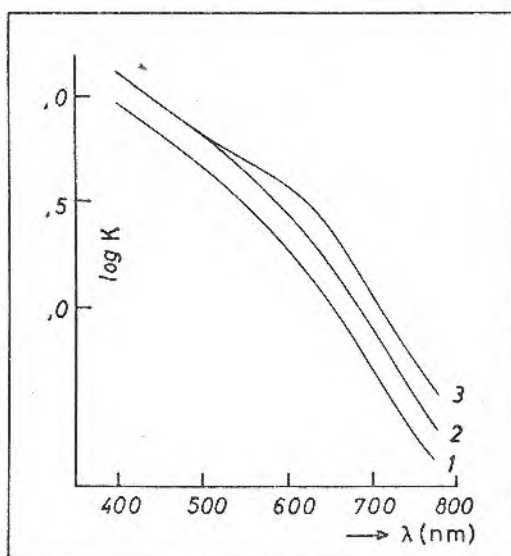


Fig.6:

Dependance of absorption of humic acids from podzol at different pH-value ( 1:pH = 3.75, 2:pH = 9.98, 3:pH = 11.80) (SALFELD 1965).



Therefore it seems improbable that the changes in absorbance in the range of 620 nm are only caused by chlorophyll-like porphyrin systems.

WIESENMÜLLER (1965) investigated "brown" and "gray" humic acids. He compared alkaline solutions of these humic acids with their hydrogen form, which were prepared with strong acid cation exchangers. The slope of the absorption spectra did not change. Therefore he assumed no influence of the hydrogen ion concentration on the absorption properties of these types of humic acids.

3. Determination of similarity degrees of humic substances by light absorption.

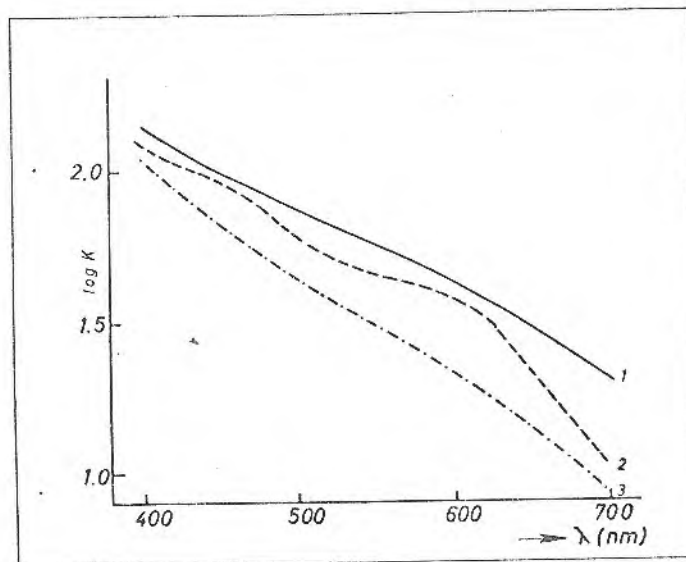


Fig. 7: Spectra of different humic acids. (1) Chernozem, (2) podzol B and (3) black peat in 0.1 N NaOH.

At first it must be established, that the spectra of humic acids are not linear, as the classical chemistry describes them. The spectra of humic acids are curved lines and are different upon the origin of the humic acids. It shall be remembered, that the

ratio of the quantities of phenols found after oxidative cleavage depends on the origin of the humic substances, and that the content and ratio of amino acids differs also after acid hydrolysis.

Therefore the spectra cannot be characterized completely according to classical theory by means of only one quotient of two extinctions at about 400 and 600 nm =  $Q_{4/6}$  -value or by the differences of the logarithms of two extinctions e.g.  $\log 400 - 600$  nm.

The calculation of the differences of the extinction in smaller ranges of wavelengths  $\Delta \log K / \Delta \lambda$  : for instance in the range of 20 nm results values, which give a better characterization of humic acids. SALFELD describes different humic acids by these "differential spectrograms".

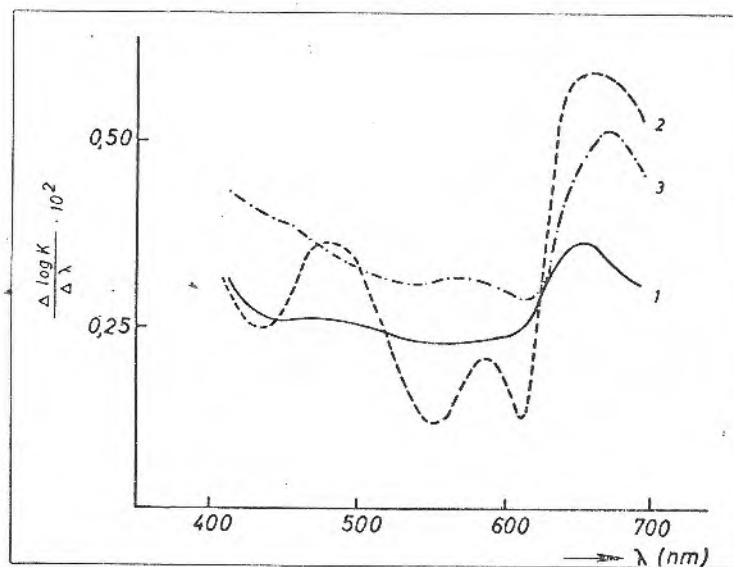


Fig. 8: Differential spectrograms of humic acids in a range of 20 nm in 0.1 N NaOH (SALFELD 1965). (1) Chernozem, (2) podzol B and (3) black peat.



Fig. 8 shows, that the spectra of humic acids are not straight lines with constant gradient, because the gradients change with the range of wavelengths and have minima between 500 and 600 nm for all 3 spectra. This means, that the spectra have a point of inflexion in this range. The changes of the gradient show remarkable quantitative differences. In the case of chernozem humic acids (1), the gradient decreases from lower to higher wavelengths at first only a little and then increases larger. The podzol humic acids (2) show at first a large decrease, a small maximum and then very large increase. In the case of humic acids from black peat (3) a larger decrease is followed by a larger increase.

The differential spectra vary in the different range of wavelength. Therefore it is not possible, that according to the theory at first fulvic acids, then humatmelanic, then humic acids are formed. If the different acids would be formed in this sequence, the course of the curves should be the same in all 3 cases.

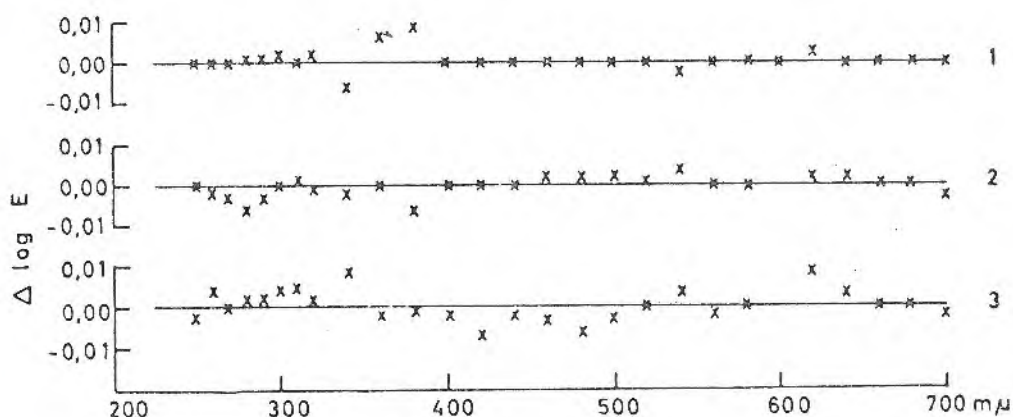


Fig. 9: Reproduceability of differences of logarithms of extinctions of different measurements with the same solution (1 and 2) and with different solutions (3) of the same preparation of chernozem.

To be able to use such measurements for a statistic of the characterization of isolated humic substances and their fractions or of systems of humic substances in soils, in cultures of microorganisms, in humification experiments or in the case of synthesis in vitro with various oxidation of phenols, the limits of reproducibility of the values must be known.

The graph shows the reproducibility of the measurements in the case of spectrum of humic acids from chernozem in 0.1 N NaOH. At first the same solution (1 and 2) has been measured every 3 minutes two times and then a second new prepared solution of the same preparation of humic acids (3) has been measured. The differences of the logarithms of the measured extinctions is plotted against the wavelengths. The differences of the values are here smaller than in the measurements of the differential spectra.

To be able to place in order the humic substances themselves or their alterations during different processes in a common system, the measured values for characterization of differences must be significant. The limits of reproducibility are not in all cases due to the method of isolation, but also due to the properties of the investigated materials. Since a voluminous material is necessary for such investigations, the methods should be automatized in regard to the apparatus as much as possible.

Investigations have been made, in which manner larger samples of humic substances or systems could be compared by means of data of light absorption and could be sorted according to groups of similarity. Thus it was tried to compare and to classify groups of preparations of humic substances by means of the data, from spectra according to a method developed by SNEATH (1957).



As a measure for the similarity the ratio of the number of same properties to the number of the total regarded properties is defined. Each object is compared with each other. In this way diagrams of similarity are obtained; one example is demonstrated in the next graph with a group of 12 humic acids.

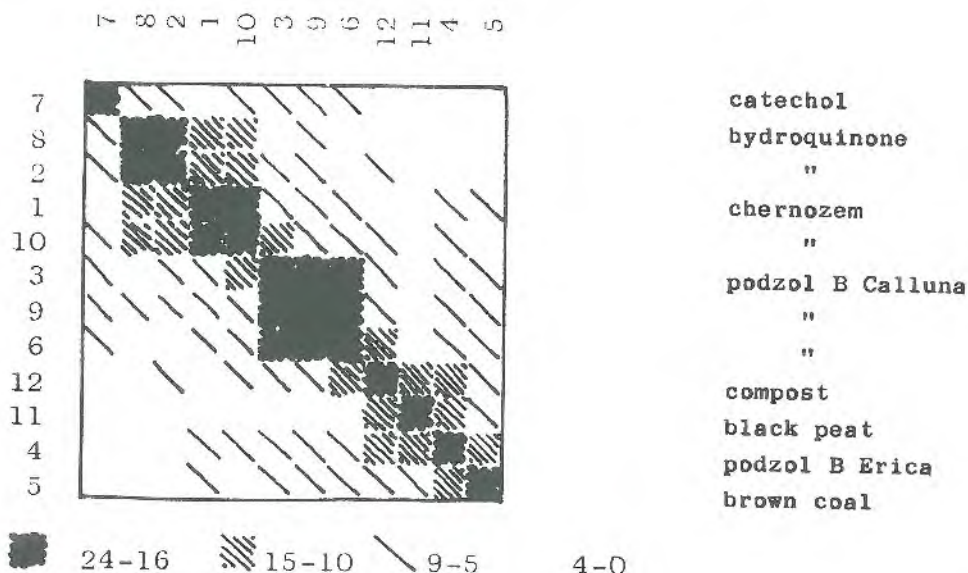


Fig. 10: Classification of humic acids, calculated.

The data can be sorted mechanically or by calculation; a distribution of groups of similarity is obtained. In this example the spectra of 12 humic acids in 8 ranges of wavelengths are subdivided and the gradients as difference of logarithms of extinction are used as measured data. These data are transformed in an index number to simplify the representation. To compare the spectra the same index numbers of two spectra are evaluated with 3 points, a difference between the index numbers of 1 and 2 points and a difference of 2 with 1 point. A number of 24 points for the similarity is obtained, when 2 spectra are identical, because 8 measured values with the same index numbers with an evaluation of 3 points is used. A complete

dissimilarity is zero points.

For further simplification the decrease of similarity are subdivided in 4 groups /24 - 16/, /15 - 10/, /9 - 5/ and /4 - 0/. The more black the quadrats are, the more similar are the spectra of the humic acids. The preparations of humic acids at first marked with any number can be arranged (classified) mechanically or by calculation, so that the hydroquinone-, the chernozem- and the podzol humic acids (Calluna) are in each case in one group.

From the diagram also the similarities between humic acids it can be seen, which are not from the same origin. So No. 10, a humic acid from chernozem is relatively similar (degree of similarity 15 - 10) with hydroquinone humic acids No. 8 and No. 2 or with the podzol B Calluna humic acid No. 3, but very dissimilar (degree of similarity 4 - 0) with the humic acid from black peat No. 11.

This method is used especially in a suitable manner, when the objects are characterized by a larger number of qualitative symptoms. If objects - in our case preparations of humic substances or their systems - are determined exclusively by measured data of properties, the similarity can be defined better as the distance of points in a n-dimensional space, whereby n is the number of the properties of the objects. For a group of objects, which are characterized by these measurable properties, a threedimensional model can be easily realized. So it is possible to represent the humic acids by means of their spectra as points in a threedimensional system of coordinates with the mentioned three extinction quotients as coordinates.

In this model 52 spectra of humic acids are presented as points with the coordinates of the extinction quotients of different ranges



of wavelengths. The position of the points in the space is a measure for the similarity. Three accumulations of points can be determined.

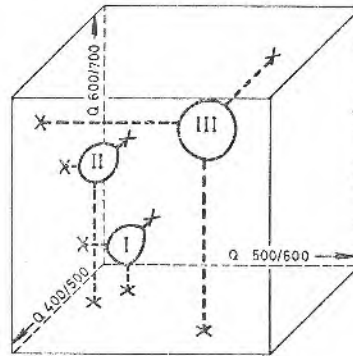


Fig. 11: Strongly schematized model of similarity of 52 humic acids by means of three extinction quotients ( $Q\ 400/500$ ;  $Q\ 500/600$  and  $Q\ 600/700$ ) (SALFELD 1968). The three groups of humic acids are marked with the numbers I, II, and III.

The closest accumulation contains the humic acids from chernozem (I), which is clearly separated from the humic acids from the podzol (II). A third accumulation is a group of preparations of humic acids (III) from different origin.

These remarks shall point out, that such possibilities of characterization exist and are worked out to classify systematically the manifold experimental material for humic substances in order to draw more general conclusions. We try to characterize the fractions of humic substances in dependence of soil genetical and ecological symptoms but also to find the correlations between the natural factors and those influenced by men during the formation and the decomposition of soil organic matter (SALFELD 1968, 1971, SALFELD and SÖCHTIG 1969, SÖCHTIG and SALFELD 1971).

Further attempts have been made for characterization of humic systems by the use of other data of properties such as carbon and nitrogen content and others.

The data in the literature cannot be used in all cases to complete such investigations, because they do not correspond to the pretensions of the necessary reproduceability.

4. An example for the characterization of humic acids and their fractions by infrared absorption.

The infrared spectroscopy of humic acids preparations and their fractions is used by many authors for the purpose of characterizing humic substances from different soil origin (KASATOCHKIN and ZILBERBRAND 1956, KASATOCHKIN, KONONOVA and ZILBERBRAND 1958, KUMADA and AIZAWA 1958, 1959, ZIECHMANN 1958, 1959, 1964, SCHARPENSEEL and ALBERSMEYER 1960, ZIECHMANN and SCHOLZ 1960, ORLOV, ROZANOVA and MATYUKHINA 1962, SCHARPENSEEL, KÖNIG and MENTHE 1964, KONONOVA 1966, THENG and POSNER 1967, TOKUDOME and KANNO, 1968, POSNER, THENG and WAKE 1968). It gives some information about the modification by chemical treatments (FARMER and MORRISON 1960, ORLOV, ROZANOVA and MATYUKHINA 1962, SCHNITZER 1965), such as methylation, acetylation, esterification, saponification and the formation of other derivatives (SCHNITZER and SKINNER 1965 (1), (2), SCHNITZER and DESJARDINS 1965). On the other hand it is possible by this method to detect changes in the chemical structure of the investigated material during oxidation and pyrolysis (SCHNITZER and HOFFMANN 1964, SCHNITZER 1965). Furthermore metal-humate complexes were investigated, which may occur by organometallic interactions in soils (KASATOCHKIN, KONONOVA and ZILBERBRAND



1958, SCHNITZER, SHEARER and WRIGHT 1959, SCHNITZER and SKINNER 1964 1965, SCHNITZER 1965, LEVESQUE and SCHNITZER 1967 b ).

Unfortunately the assignment of the specific absorption bands is limited by the fact that soil organic matter preparations represent in most cases mixtures of more or less complex molecules with different types of linkages and functional groups.

This fact leads to an overlapping of the characteristic absorption bands. The infrared absorption spectra of humic acids therefore show some bands, which are not particularly elucidative for the chemical nature of the molecule. The spectra indicate that some absorption bands do not originate from identical structural features, but probably from similar groups in different molecular surroundings. The infrared absorption properties of these samples are also strongly influenced by the different methods of sample preparation, different methods of soil extraction and the following fractionation. In cases where pellet techniques are used the time of grinding and evacuation is also an influential factor.

There are some difficulties in the real assignment of the infrared absorption bands of humic acids preparations. Some main absorption regions are found which appear in nearly all soil organic matter preparations with some differences in intensity or specific wavelengths of the absorption.

In order to give a general assignment of the main infrared absorption bands humic acids prepared according to (FLAIG, SCHEFFER and KLAMROTH 1955) from chernozem are chosen for comparison. The soil was prepared by hydrochloric acid (0.5 %) pretreatment and extracted with 0.5 % sodium hydroxide. After centrifugation and several reprecipitations

and dialysis these raw humic acids were subfractionated with 2 N NaCl at neutral conditions. The "gray" humic acids fraction (G-fraction) was precipitated in sodium chloride, while the "brown" humic acids fraction (B-fraction) remained in solution. After dialysis the G-fraction shows an ash content of 10 %, while the B-fractions has only 3,5 % of inorganic constituents.

A comparison of the infrared spectra of the raw humic acids (fig. 12 (1)), the gray humic acids fraction (fig. 12 (2)) and the brown humic acids fraction (fig. 12 (3)) shows that the main differences in intensity of absorption bands are in the region at  $9.72 \mu$  ( $1029 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) which is assigned to the Si-O-Si vibration frequencies of a complex silicate mineral component. Specific investigations of the "gray" humic acids fraction by infrared analysis and electron microscopy gave evidence of the occurrence of a smectite mineral of the montmorillonite type, as it is shown by the spectrum of standard montmorillonite (fig. 12 (4)), (RIETZ unpublished).

It shall not be reported about all details of the assignment of the infrared red absorption bands; this can be taken from publications. Only it should be demonstrated, that sometimes it is necessary to do basic research work to get methods for very practical use such as the characterization of humic systems or to explain the properties of different fractions of humic acids, such as "gray" and "brown" humic acids fractions.



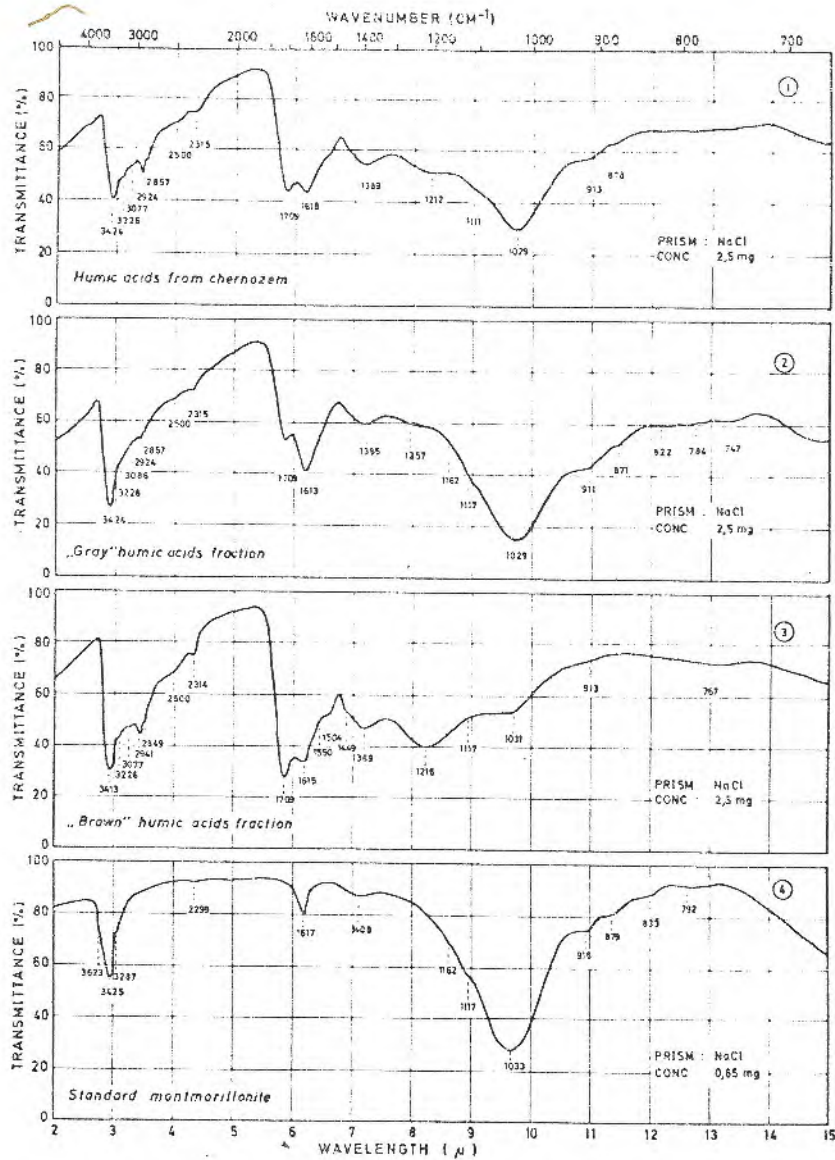


Fig. 12: Infrared spectra of humic acids from chernozem.  
 (1) Original  
 (2) "Gray" humic acids fraction  
 (3) "Brown" humic acids fraction  
 (4) Standard montmorillonite

5. About the efficiency of optical methods for characterization of humic fractions.

A critical evaluation of the optical methods in the range of ultra-violet, visible and infrared range leadt to the following conclusions:

- 1) All these methods are not suited for exact determination of chemical structure.
- 2) It is only possible to show differences when the material is isolated in the same way by a conventional method. Preparations of humic acids for instance, isolated from the same soil but with different methods show differences, which are nearly so large as isolations from different soils.
- 3) Only some bands of infrared spectra can be assigned to special groups in the molecules of humic acids.
- 4) The differences in absorption are large enough to determine characteristics of humic systems by statistical methods, which can be used for their classification.

A preposition is the isolation according to a special method which must be used in every case. The needed number for statistical methods requires complete automatized procedures at least of spectroscopy and the calculation.



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