

Flotation of Egyptian Newly Discovered Fine Phosphate Ore of Nile Valley

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Abstract - Phosphate ores are used for phosphoric acid, fertilizers and animal feed production. In Egypt phosphate ore reserves are present in three main localities namely; Nile valley, new valley in western desert, and the eastern desert along the red sea coast. Currently, newly discovered phosphate ores are being mined from Nile valley areas mainly for exportation and partially for local production of fertilizers. However, in exporting such ores, the mining companies export only the coarse fractions of the run of mine ores of high grade (over 30 % P_2O_5) while the fine fractions of low grade (~ 18-22 % P_2O_5 content), for the time being, are rejected. This is because such fine fractions contain different gangue minerals such as calcite and silica. This paper aims at studying the amenability of upgrading such rejected fine fractions of Nile valley areas through application of froth flotation process. Such flotation technique is investigated to separate the associated gangues (silica and calcite) from the fine fractions of phosphate ores. The different operating conditions affecting on the efficiency of separation of phosphate mineral from its associated gangues are studied. These parameters, among others, are collector dosage, depressant dose, and pH. At the optimum conditions of flotation, a phospho-concentrate of about P_2O_5 of 29.5 % and 7.6 % A.I. is obtained from a feed sample containing about 21.13 % P_2O_5 and 19 % A.I.

Key Words: Flotation, Phosphate ore, Francolite, Sodium carbonate, Oleic acid.

1. Introduction

Phosphate ores are in high demand all over the world because they are the raw materials for the production of phosphate fertilizers and other chemicals (Fang and Jun, 2011). About 191Mt of phosphate were produced in 2011 and the USGS predicts that worldwide phosphate production will be increased to 228Mt by 2015. High percentage of phosphate rock (~ 95%) is consumed in manufacturing of fertilizers and animal feed supplements. The rest of the production is used to produce elemental phosphorus and defluorinated phosphate rock, which used for direct application to the soil (Jasinski, 2012). The world phosphates are distributed according to their type, approximately as follows: 75% from sedimentary deposits, 15-20% from igneous, metamorphic and weathered deposits, and 2-3% from biogenic sources (Abouzeid, 2008). Egypt strives to become as self-sufficient as possible by making maximum use of its own resources. Fortunately, these raw materials of minerals (such as phosphate rock) are all distributed in Egypt in many localities with considerable reserves. In addition, new areas, as surface mines, are discovered in the Nile valley region. Current mining practice in these areas involves extracting ores from the mines, and conducting crushing and sizing techniques to recover the coarse fraction of high grade (28 - 30 % P_2O_5) for exportation and stockpiling or leaving in place the fine fraction, of low grade (18 - 22 % P_2O_5). There are three main deposits of sedimentary phosphate deposits, along the red sea coast, in the Nile valley and in the Western Desert. The phosphate-bearing minerals in Egypt are known as the Duwi phosphate formation. It consists of shale, lime stones, marls, sandstones, and phosphorites of about 20 -70 m thick (Notholt et al., 1989). In Nile Valley region, thirteen groups of deposits have been identified, the

most important economically being the El-Sebaiya (west Mahamid) and El- Mahamid deposits near El-Sebaiya.

Because of the increasing world demand for phosphate, P_2O_5 content of the ore is gradually falling, and it is becoming economical to mine and beneficiate many lower-grade deposits (El-Jalead et al., 1980). The majority of the process is dependent on methods of separation of phosphate minerals from their associated gangue minerals (Elgillani and Abouzeid, 1993 and ÖZER, 2003). These phosphate rocks are classified into siliceous, clayey, calcareous, igneous and metamorphic ores (Abouzeid, 2008). Flotation process is the most applicable technique to upgrade phosphate ores. Flotation method has been carried out successfully to separate oxides and silicate minerals from sparingly soluble minerals such as apatite, fluorite, magnesite and sheelite, which have the hydrophilic character, giving the hydrophobic nature to the desired minerals by various reagents (Sis and Chander, 2003). In this paper, the amenability of upgrading of newly discovered Egyptian phosphate ore in Nile valley has been studied. Different parameters affect the flotation process including, collector dose, depressant dose, pH and type of modifiers have been tested to reach the optimum conditions of separation.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Materials

A phosphate ore sample was collected from El-Sebaiya locality, Nile Valley, Egypt. Oleic acid was used as a collector and sodium silicate as a silica depressant. Collector was used as a mixture of oleic acid and fuel oil (1:1 ratio) while sodium silicate was used as 10 % solution. These reagents are of BDH grade. Analytical grade HCl, NaOH and Na_2CO_3 were used as pH modifiers.

2.2. Methods

2.2.1. Sample Preparation

The phosphate sample was subjected to primary and secondary crushing leading to a product of 100% - 6.3 mm. Sampling of the crushed product was conducted by a 'Denver' Jones riffle to about 5 kg batches. One of these batches was ground using rod mills to reach the liberation size, at 0.208 mm. The ground product was deslimed at 0.045mm screen. The fraction -0.208+0.045 mm was used as a feed for the flotation process. Another batch was finely ground to - 200 mesh, in a laboratory analytical mill, for XRD and chemical analysis.

2.2.2. Chemical Analysis

Complete chemical analysis of the sample was conducted by X-ray fluorescence (XRF). For routine chemical analysis, acid insoluble residue (A.I.) was determined using standard method of opening and dissolution of the samples (using HCl and HNO_3). Silica was determined using the standard gravimetric method while the filtrate solution was used for determining P_2O_5 content using the standard spectrometric methods.

2.2.3. X-ray Diffraction Analysis

Identification of the mineral composition of the considered sample was conducted by X-ray diffraction (XRD), using the data of the powder pattern of the ASTM on cobalt radiation target with Fe filter at 30 kV and 20 mA. A 'Philips' X-ray diffractometer (PW 1730) was used. The scanning was limited from $2\theta=1$ to $2\theta= 80$ degree range.

2.2.4. Flotation Experiments

The flotation tests were performed in a conventional Denver D-12 sub-aeration flotation machine with 1.0 liter capacity cell. The floated fraction was collected until the froth was barren. The reagents utilized were depressant (sodium silicate, doses from 0.5 -2 kg/ton); collector (oleic acid, doses from 1-3 kg/ton) and pH modifier (sodium carbonate). Conditioning of the pulp with reagents was performed for 2 min for the depressant and 3 min for the collector at 2000 rpm at about 50% solids by weight. Flotation

process was performed at 1500 rpm. The flotation products (froth and sink) were collected, dried, weighed and analyzed.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Mineral Composition and Characterization

Figure 1 represents the mineral composition. The phosphorites from Nile valley area is composed of phosphatic grains (Francolite) that occur as coarse-grained structure-less grains and bone fragments that range in size 70 to 80 μm . These phosphatic grains are cemented by fine-grained (few microns) authohegenic calcite and/or chalcedony few grains of coarse to medium-grained detrital quartz are scattered with the phosphatic constituents (Baoumy and Tada, 2005). This is confirmed by XRD analysis, Fig.2.

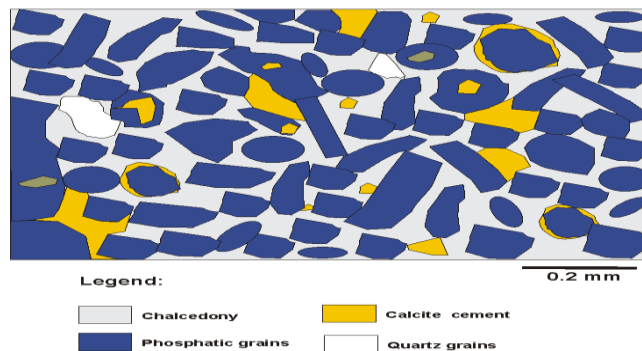


Fig.1. A sketch shows the textural relationships between the mineral constituents of the Nile Valle phosphorites.

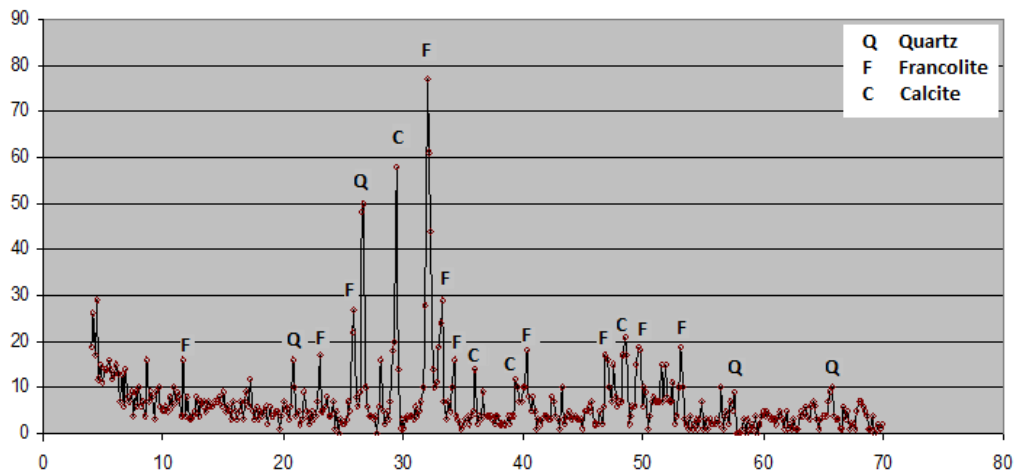


Fig.2. XRD pattern of phosphate sample.

As noticed in Fig. 2, the phosphate sample is dominated by Francolite $(\text{Ca,Na,Mg})_{10}(\text{PO}_4)_{6-x}(\text{CO}_3)_x\text{Fy}(\text{F,OH})_2$ associated with calcium hydrogen phosphate hydrate $\text{CaHPO}_4 \cdot (\text{H}_2\text{O})_2$, quartz, SiO_2 and calcite, CaCO_3 . Chemical analysis of sample, using XRF, is investigated the results of which are shown in Table 1. The sample contains lower content of P_2O_5 (~ 21.13 %) and higher amount of CaO (48.63 %) indicating the presence of other phases for calcium bearing minerals such as calcite and gypsum (2.43 % SO_3) in addition to apatite. This might explain the presence of higher acid insoluble (19.1 % A.I) than the silica content (11.81 % SiO_2). The loss on ignition (LOI) is about 10.1% as a result of decomposition of apatite and calcite upon heating. The sample has about 2.77 % Fe_2O_3 and lower content of MgO (0.22 %).

Table 1. Chemical Analysis of Phosphate Sample.

Oxide	P ₂ O ₅ %	CaO %	MgO %	Fe ₂ O ₃ %	SiO ₂ %	SO ₃ %	F %	A.I %	L.O.I. %
%	21.13	48.63	0.22	2.77	11.81	2.43	0.75	19.1	10.1

3.2. Flotation of Phosphate Ore

Sparingly soluble minerals are hydrophilic. Selective hydrophobization of the desired mineral by various reagents is critical in determining the effectiveness of the separation process. The separation of sparingly soluble minerals from oxide and silicate minerals has been successfully carried out by flotation method. However, separation of phosphate from carbonates (e.g., calcite, dolomite, etc.) is found to be difficult due to their similar surface properties (Somasundaran, and Markovic, 1998). The type of phosphate deposit affects the flotation performance. Sedimentary deposits of phosphate ores can be treated by flotation when the gangue consists essentially of siliceous materials, as the phosphatic sandstone in Central Florida. The sedimentary phosphates with high carbonates (e.g., Southern Florida and Mediterranean area), however, are not easily floated. Beneficiation of phosphate ores containing carbonate gangue is a worldwide problem and adequate technology for processing for such ores on an industrial scale does not exist at present (Abdel-Khalek, 2000). Since most of the world's phosphate resources, approximately 80% or more, consist of carbonated sedimentary ores, extensive researches at both laboratory and pilot-plant scales have been devoted to carbonate-phosphate separation by flotation. Poor amenability of non-weathered sedimentary phosphates to flotation is attributed to unfavourable texture and mineral distribution in ore particles (Prasad et al., 2000).

3.2.1. Effect of Collector Dosage

Fatty acids are the most commonly used collectors in direct flotation of phosphate ores. The long chains of fatty acids and their salts are the most extensively used especially oleic acid or sodium oleate. The effect of oleic acid dosage on flotation performance of phosphate ore was evaluated and the results are given in Fig. 3. In these experiments, 0.5 kg/ton sodium silicate was used as a depressant for silica. As noticed, both the recovery and grade of P₂O₅ increases by increasing the collector dosage till reaching the critical value of oleic acid 1.5 kg/t where a concentrate of 28.17 % of P₂O₅ with the minimum amount of silica 9.87 % was obtained. Further addition of oleic acid increases of recovery at the expense of the grade (P₂O₅ 26.5 %), Fig. 3.

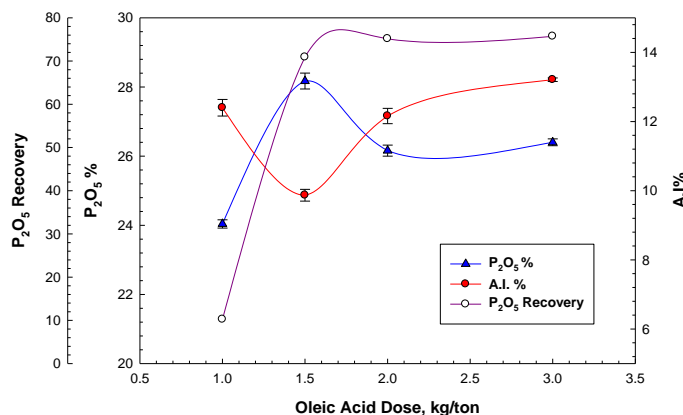


Fig.3. Effect of oleic acid dose on flotation.

For effective separations, selective adsorption of the collector at mineral/ water interface is essential. The mechanism of the adsorption of fatty acid based collectors on the salt-type minerals, as phosphate, has been widely studied and a comprehensive review on this subject was published by (Hanna and Somasundaran, 1976). In general, chemisorptions, surface precipitation and bulk precipitation are thought

to be the important reactions in these systems. However, a clear understanding on the chemistry of fatty acid interaction does not exist. Rao et al. (1988) had suggested, based on their adsorption and zeta potential measurements of oleic acid on apatite, a bi-layer formation prior to the precipitation of calcium oleate (Rao et al., 1988). They concluded that oleate condenses two-dimensionally with the carboxylate group on Ca-sites, followed by the association of hydrocarbon chains due to strong lateral bonds (Rao et al., 1988 and Rao et al., 1989). Thus it is expected that the recovery of phosphate would increase by increasing the oleic acid dosage, due to its adsorption on the Ca-sites of phosphate mineral in addition to the flotation of silica particles, as shown in Fig. 3, up to certain dosage (e.g. 3 kg/t) leading to lower grade. Similar trends have been mentioned by the authors for phosphates from other localities (Abdel-Khalek et al., 1994). From Fig. 3, it is clear that the optimum dosage of oleic acid is 1.5 kg/ton. Therefore this dose is used in the subsequent tests.

3.2.2. Effect of Sodium Silicate Dosage

Figure 4 represents the effect of sodium silicate dosage on the flotation of phosphate sample. Different doses of sodium silicate were tested starting from 0.5 kg/ton till 2 kg/ton at a definite dose (1.5 kg/ton) of oleic acid. A lower dosage (0.5 kg/t) of sodium silicate was enough to get the best grade with suitable recovery. Further addition of sodium silicate did not improve the grade. It has been known that sodium silicate has a beneficial effect when used with fatty acid and fuel oil mixture due to its ability of depressing silica that causes higher collector selectivity and enhancing the separation efficiency (Sis and Chander, 2003). The mechanism of minerals depression is mainly due to the hydrolysis of sodium silicate solution which produces a number of monomeric, polymeric and colloidal species. The role of each species on the depression mechanism was studied by some researchers (Al-Thyabat, 2009). These studies showed that the polymeric sodium silicate solution has more depression effect due to the ability of the polymer to cover larger surface of the silica mineral.

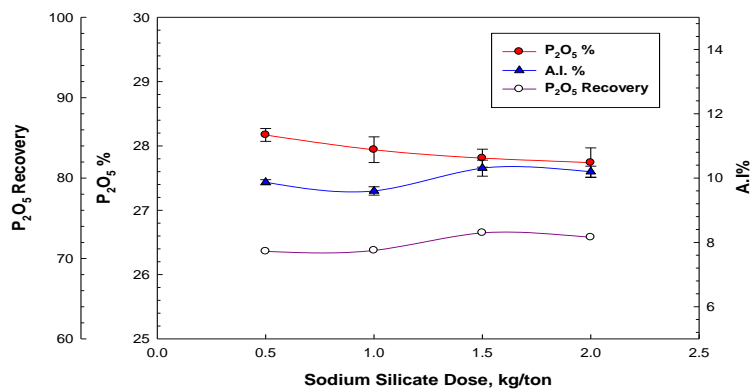


Fig.4. Effect of sodium silicate dosage on phosphate flotation.

3.2.3. Effect of pH

Slurry pH value is considered as one of the important factors that has a highly effect on phosphate flotation, to establish the correct sequence of pH adjustment procedures, the optimum points, and the levels of additions. The solution pH determines the extent of ionization and hydrolysis of collector; this helps or hinders the adsorption of the collector at the various ionized solid/liquid interfaces, contributing to greater or lesser selectivity of flotation (Leja, 1982). Flotation tests were conducted to investigate the effect of slurry pH on the collector performance in apatite flotation by varying the pH from 8-11. Figure 5 demonstrates the effect of pH slurry in the presence of 1.5 kg/t of the collector and 0.5 kg/t sodium silicate while using sodium hydroxide as pH regulator. It can be seen that the flotation efficiency increased with increasing pH values starting from pH 8. A concentrate with the best grade (P₂O₅ 28.17 % and 9.87 % A.I. with a recovery of 70.89%) was obtained at pH 9.5. Above such pH, the grade starts to decrease at higher pH range. This observation is in agreement with the previous studies (Kou et al., 2010).

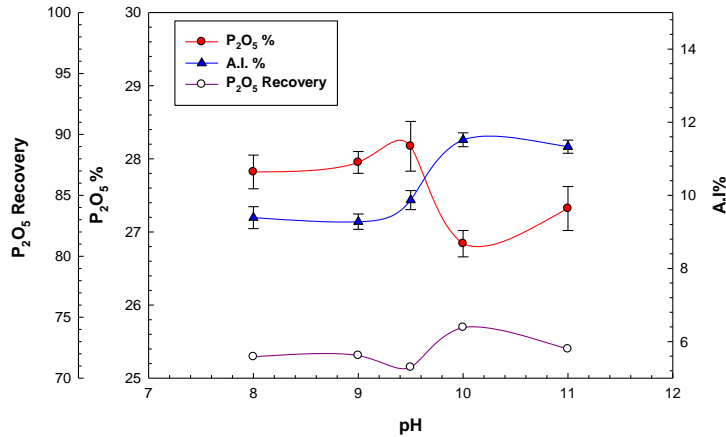
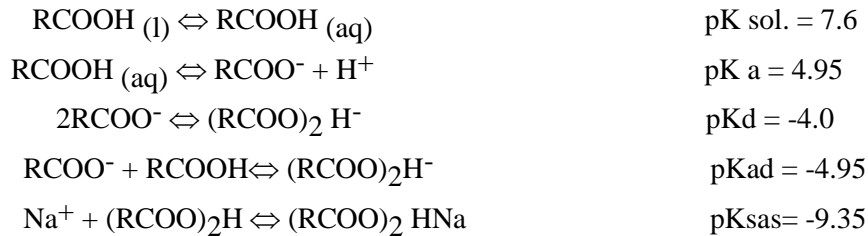


Fig.5. Effect of pH value on flotation using NaOH pH modifier.

It is known that oleic acid as a fatty acid collector is a weak acid. It undergoes hydrolysis and forms complex species which exhibit markedly different solubilities and surface active characteristics according to the following chemical equilibria (Somasundaran and Ananthapadmanabhan 1979):



The concentration of the ionic species OL⁻, (OL)₂, (OL)⁻² and that of the molecular one HOL(aq) depend on the pH of the solution. For example, below pH 6 the predominant dissolved species is HOL(aq) while above pH 8, OL⁻ and (OL)⁻² are the predominant ones (Fuerstenau et al., 1985). Rapid flotation occurs at the pH where the collector present in the hydrolyzed forms (OL⁻ and (OL)⁻²), i.e. above pH 8. Under these conditions, significantly increased amounts of collector are present in the stern plane (Fuerstenau 1982). This probably explains the maximum recovery obtained at pH 9.5. Below this pH range the neutral oleic acid, HOL, precipitates from the aqueous solution and, in turn, flotation is deteriorated. Significant drop in the grade (i.e., lower P₂O₅ % with higher A.I. %) was noticed at highly alkaline medium (pH 10 - 11) probably due to the electrostatic repulsion between the negative species OL⁻ and (OL)⁻² and that of similar charges of the phosphate surface. Also, the presence of calcium ions (derived either from the phosphate mineral or its associated calcite gangue) at such high pH values may lead to precipitation of oleate which, in turn, deteriorates flotation process (Abdel-Khalek et al., 1994).

3.2.4. Effect of Type of pH Modifier on Phosphate Flotation

The type of modifier used to control the pH is often of paramount significance, the economic aspect alone i.e. the price, is obviously not always the sole criterion to follow in deciding which pH modifier to use, since the ions derived from such modifier may play a very significant role in some systems (Kou et al., 2010). On using sodium carbonate (Na₂CO₃) as pH modifier instead of sodium hydroxide (NaOH), the same trend was obtained as in case of sodium hydroxide within the pH range 8 – 11. The only change is that lower grade (P₂O₅ 27.15 % and A.I. 10.09%) is obtained in comparison to P₂O₅ % 28.17 % and 9.87 % A.I. with a recovery of 70.89% while using NaOH at pH 9.5. It can be concluded that NaOH is more favourable in phosphate flotation.

3.2.5. Effect of Cleaning the Rougher Concentrate

In a trial to improve the grade of concentrate, the obtained rougher concentrate was subjected to a cleaning stage without adding further reagents. A final concentrate with 29.5 % P_2O_5 , recovery of about 68.06 % and A. I. of about 7.65 % was obtained after such mechanical cleaning, Table 2. It is clear that cleaning of the rougher concentrate can improve its grade due to reduction of the hydrophilic silica particles in the froth product which may be collected with hydrophobic phosphate particles by entrainment or/and entrapment. The specifications of such final concentrate satisfy the requirements for phosphoric acid and fertilizers production.

Table 2. Flotation experimental to phosphate ore at optimum conditions.

No	Wt%	P_2O_5 %	A.I%	L.O.I. %	Recovery P_2O_5 %
Concentrate	80.31	29.53	7.65	10.17	68.06
Tail 2	3.61	16.56	46.49	5.4	1.71
Tail 1	16.08	13.12	64.16	4.18	6.05
Assay	100	26.42	18.14	9.034	75.82

4. Conclusion

- The main role of sodium silicate in phosphate flotation is to depress the silica particles by the precipitation of sodium silicate polymeric species on silica particles. Also, sodium silicate interacts with calcium ions and precipitates them as calcium silicate in the solution, and on silica and phosphate particle which explain why extra sodium silicate dosage may significantly reduce phosphate recovery. NaOH is better than Na_2CO_3 as pH modifier in phosphate flotation. A concentrate with the best grade was obtained at pH 9.5 where the collector (oleic acid) is present in the hydrolyzed forms (OL⁻ and (OL)⁻²). Cleaning of the rougher concentrate can improve grade due to reduction of the hydrophilic silica particles in the froth product which may be collected with hydrophobic phosphate particles by entrainment or/and entrapment.
- The grade and recovery of concentrates are significantly affected by changing the studied parameters. On applying the optimum conditions (i.e., 1.5 kg/t oleic acid and 0.5 kg/t sodium silicate, pH 9.5 using NaOH) of flotation followed by a stage of cleaning, a final concentrate with 29.5 % P_2O_5 and 7.65 % A.I with a recovery of about 68.06 % was obtained.

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