



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Thermochimica Acta

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tca

Combustion behaviour of some biodesulphurized coals assessed by TGA/DTA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 May 2009

Received in revised form 21 August 2009

Accepted 21 August 2009

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Coal

Sulphur

Biodesulphurization

Thermogravimetry

DTA

ABSTRACT

Thermal analysis, i.e. TGA/DTA is used to study the changes in the combustion behaviour of microbially treated coals. In view of their high sulphur content and industrial significance three samples are under consideration, i.e. one lignite and two subbituminous from different region in Bulgaria. The differences in burning profiles can be related to structural changes resulted from biological treatments. The overall biological treatment generates these changes probably due to the oxidation process. Concerning organic sulphur biodesulphurization there is no change in any drastic manner of the thermal characteristic parameters. In general, applied biotreatments provoke a complex influence on combustion coal behaviour. From one side a better ignition performance, a minor decrease in higher heating value and diminishing peak temperature of maximum weight loss rate for all biotreated samples are observed. From other side some decrease in the combustibility indicated by an increase in the combustion time and the end of combustion temperature are obvious. Also well determined decrease of self-heating temperature after biotreatments evolves high risk of spontaneous unmanageable coal combustion.

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1. Introduction

Sulphur emission from coal combustion presents many environmental problems, since during burning sulphur is emitted mainly as sulphur oxides. Among various methods of sulphur removal, desulphurization processes before combustion seems to be more promising in view of environmental and economical aspects. Recently, biological approaches, i.e. biodesulphurization, became more popular, as processes were performed under mild conditions with no harmful reaction products and the overall characteristic of coal was slightly affected.

Sulphur is present in coal mainly as inorganic, i.e. pyritic, sulphate, and organic forms. Pyritic sulphur occurs in coal as mineral matter whereas the organic sulphur is presented as an integral part of the coal matrix. Applying different biodesulphurization procedures it is difficult to attain high organic sulphur removal and moderate coal destruction at the same time. The last one reflected in a decrease in coal energy value, which is not recommended for energy production.

The main process covered by coal microbial desulphurization is the removal of inorganic sulphuric minerals (more than 95%). It is

reported that organic sulphur is affected as well and higher than 50% removal is announced [1]. In any case it is of significant importance to achieve high sulphur reductions accompanied by good coal combustion parameters.

Thermal analytical methods such as thermogravimetry (TGA) and differential thermal analyses (DTA) have been shown to be an effective tool to study coal combustion behaviour [2,3]. Various combustion characteristics can be obtained from burning TGA and DTA profiles. Previous TGA studies demonstrated that combustion is influenced by the presence of inorganic material [4], by coal rank [5] and coal macerals [6,7]. Many authors did thermal study of coal but few of them published information concerning the effect of sulphur on coal thermal behaviour [8,9].

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the changes in the combustion behaviour of coals after exposure to the action of bacterial desulphurizing attack. Therefore a comparison is performed between the combustion characteristics of the initial and the biotreated samples.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Materials

In the present study three high sulphur low rank coal samples from different deposits in Bulgaria are selected. Two of them are

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from “M.Iztok” and “B.Dol” basins, and the last one, in view of its high organic sulphur content is from “Pirin” mine. The “M.Iztok” coal is lignite while “B.Dol” and “Pirin” samples are subbituminous coals. The first two “mean samples” are taken from feet industrial stores while the third one is individually hand picked up from “Pirin” mine. The last coal sample “Pirin” is preliminary demineralized by Radmacher method [10] and treated by diluted nitric acid [11]. The aim of these chemical treatments is to diminish mineral matter and inorganic sulphur influence, mainly pyrite sulphur (S_p), on organic sulphur biodesulphurization efficiency. Before biodesulphurization treatments all coal samples are grounded under 0.06 mm.

2.2. Biodesulphurization

Active microorganisms and microbial systems are selected bearing in mind results from the previous investigations [12]. Pure cultures of microorganisms are obtained from microbial bank ATCC (American Type Culture Collection) and natural isolates. The isolation and identification of microorganisms as well as the condition for cultivation are carried out by methods described elsewhere [13–16]. Coal samples are mixed with microorganisms in the ratio 3 g coal to 100 ml microorganism medium. Microbial strains are as follow:

- *Phanerochaeta Chrysosporium* (ME464) – (PC), white rot fungi, pH 4.7, temperature 30 °C, 6 days duration;
- *Sulfolobus solfataricus* (35091) – (SS), pH 4.0, temperature 70 °C, 14 days duration;
- *Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans* – (R, F). Differences between the strains *Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans* R and F are in oxidation rates to Fe and S.
“B.Dol” and “M.Iztok” samples are treated with microbial strains *Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans* R and F at the follow conditions:
“B.Dol”-R and “B.Dol”-F at pH 5.0, temperature 28 °C, 21 days duration;
“M.Iztok”-R at pH 2.0, temperature 28 °C, 21 days duration;
- *Pseudomonas putida* – (B), pH 6.0, temperature 28 °C, 21 days duration; microbial strains are assigned in the article for convenience as PC, SS, R, F and B.

The losses of coal matter after applied biotreatments are less than 10% (including deashing), due to the performed technical procedures and no to microbial action.

2.3. TGA and DTA analyses

Coal combustion TGA/DTA analyses are performed on a *Universal V3.0A TA Instruments*. The samples (20–25 mg, particle size below 0.06 mm) are heated to 800 °C at the rate 10 °C/min, individually in the atmosphere of dry air and nitrogen flow rate of 50 cm³/min.

The coal combustion experiments are carried out in an atmosphere of air flow. In order to measure the ignition temperature of coals, the TGA experiments are performed under air and nitrogen atmosphere. Various characteristic parameters from combustion profiles can be obtained. They are defined as follow [17–19]:

- T_{ign} (°C): ignition temperature at which the weight loss curve of the coal combustion is separated from the curve of the coal pyrolysis;
 T_{max} (°C): peak temperature of maximum weight loss rate;
 T_{ec} (°C): end of combustion temperature at which the rate of heat flow is zero;
 $(T_{ec} - T_{ign})$ (°C): temperature interval between T_{ec} and T_{ign} ;

Table 1
Proximate analysis (wt.%) and HHV.

Sample	Moisture ^a	Ash ^a	VM ^a	Fix C ^a	HHV (MJ/kg)	ΔHHV (%) ^b
M.Iztok	5.53	34.30	31.76	28.41	17.45	0
M.Iztok-R	3.65	34.24	34.80	27.31	16.50	5.4
M.Iztok-B	5.44	33.77	31.79	29.00	17.30	0.8
B.Dol	9.15	53.74	13.63	23.48	12.91	0
B.Dol-R	6.92	49.70	16.66	26.72	12.80	0.8
B.Dol-F	6.65	50.77	16.00	26.58	12.30	4.7
Pirin	6.45	10.36	30.97	52.22	23.25	0
Pirin-APF	6.16	0.01	39.66	54.17	23.00	1.1
Pirin-APF-PC	6.62	0.53	39.80	53.05	23.10	0.6
Pirin-APF-SS	5.34	1.69	36.12	56.85	23.20	0.2

SS: *Sulfolobus solfataricus*; PC: *Phanerochaeta Chrysosporium*; R, F: *Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans* (R and F are differences between the strains *Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans* in oxidation rates to Fe and S; B: *Pseudomonas putida*; HHV: higher heating value; VM: volatile matter.

^a As received basis.

^b ΔHHV relatively decreasing obtained by a bomb calorimeter, in %.

T_{sh} (°C): self-heating temperature at which the rate of heat flow, in DTA curve, begins to be exothermic;

R_{max} (%/min): maximum combustion rate;

t_q (min): time interval relates to combustion temperature interval between T_{ec} and T_{ign} temperatures.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Characteristics of coal samples

The data from proximate analysis are included in Table 1, as well as the data for higher heating value (HHV), determined by a bomb calorimeter [20]. After biotreatment procedures, the reduction of the ash content reaches a maximum of 8%. An exception is at “Pirin”-APF sample, where preliminary treatment with strong mineral acids is applied [10,11].

Elemental analysis data are gathered in Table 2 including the data for types of sulphur species determined by ISO standards [21]. It is demonstrated that the highest biodesulphurization effect towards total sulphur (S_t) is achieved for “M.Iztok-B”, 44%. Concerning inorganic sulphur (S_{inorg}) the highest biodesulphurization is 84% again for “M.Iztok-B” and (77%) for “Pirin-APF” where there is a chemical desulphurization. Organic sulphur (S_{org}) is calculated by the difference from S_t and the sum of pyritic (S_p) and sulphate (S_s) sulphur. In this calculation the content of insoluble sulphate sulphur, produced during microbial treatment is not considered [22]. This fact can explain the increased value for S_{org} after biotreatments of “M.Iztok” and B.Dol” coal samples (Table 2).

Concerning biotreatments of coal sample “Pirin” ash pyrite free (APF), the applied microorganisms demonstrate mixed influence on S_{org} and S_{inorg} presence. The diminishing of S_{org} attains 24% by *Phanerochaeta Chrysosporium* (PC) fungi.

There are some oxygen and nitrogen increasing amounts registered in treated samples (Table 2). All performed biotreatments produce moderate oxygen increase while preliminary treatment with diluted nitric acid instead of applying mild conditions attains 4.59 wt.% oxygen increase. So the utilization of diluted nitric acid as coal desulphurizing agent to pyrite removal has an action as oxidation agent, which is in accordance with other study [23].

3.2. TGA and DTA burning profiles

The DTG curves of coal samples are presented in Fig. 1A–D. In these profiles the mass loss up to 100 °C is due to water evaporation. One sharp peak is observed in the range (250–300 °C) before the major degradation for the biotreated “M.Iztok” and “Pirin” coal samples (Fig. 1A and C). This could be assigned to the release of addi-

Table 2
Elemental analysis and sulphur types (wt.%).

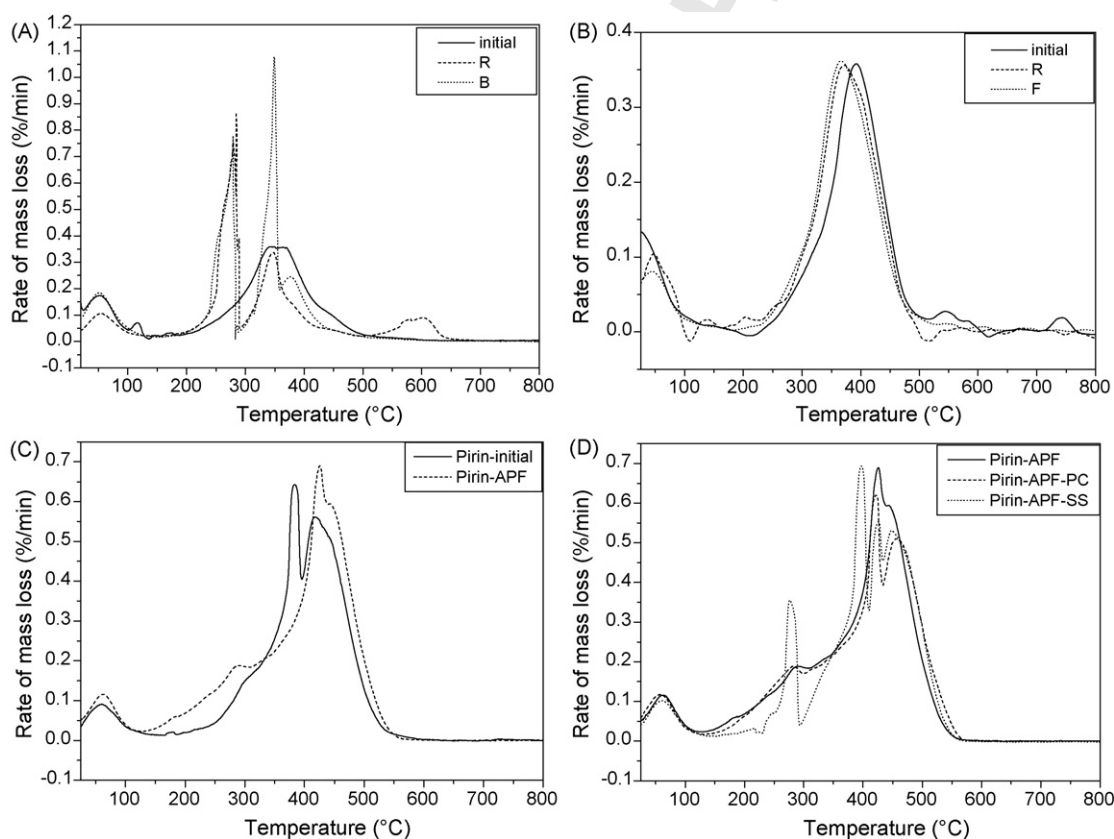
Sample	C ^{daf}	H ^{daf}	N ^{daf}	S _{org} ^{daf}	O _{diff} ^{daf}	Types of sulphur species						
						S _t ^{db}	^a ΔS _t	S _s ^{db}	S _p ^{db}	^b ΔS _{inorg}	ΔS _{org}	S _{org} ^{db}
M.Iztok	61.33	6.25	1.23	2.79	28.40	4.77	0	0.44	2.55	0	0	1.78
M.Iztok-R	59.81	5.41	2.47	3.54	28.77	3.37	29	0.25	0.84	64	-	2.28
M.Iztok-B	60.58	5.04	2.28	3.42	28.68	2.68	44	0.13	0.35	84	-	2.20
B.Dol	74.94	6.33	2.01	0.62	16.10	1.39	0	0.22	0.92	0	0	0.25
B.Dol-R	68.88	6.26	3.33	1.11	20.42	1.25	10	0.22	0.51	36	-	0.52
B.Dol-F	70.36	6.02	3.37	1.20	19.05	1.20	14	0.19	0.46	43	-	0.55
Pirin	63.37	5.18	1.54	4.37	25.54	4.88	0	0.48	0.51	0	0	3.89
Pirin-APF	59.29	4.06	2.65	3.87	30.13	4.10	16	0	0.23	77	0	3.87
Pirin-APF	59.40	4.10	2.70	2.95	30.85	3.09	^c	0	0.16	^c	^c	2.93
Pirin-APF-PC							25			30	24	
Pirin-APF	58.60	4.01	3.09	3.32	30.98	3.47	^c	0	0.20	^c	^c	3.27
Pirin-APF-SS							15			13	16	

daf: dry ash free; db: dry basis; S_t: total sulphur; S_s: sulphate sulphur; S_p: pyritic sulphur; S_{org} and S_{inorg}: organic and inorganic sulphur.

^a ΔS_t (%) = (S_t initial - S_t exp.) / S_t initial × 100.

^b ΔS_{inorg} (%) = ((S_s + S_p) initial - (S_s + S_p) exp.) / (S_s + S_p) initial × 100.

^c ΔS_t, ΔS_{inorg} and ΔS_{org} are calculated on the basis S_t initial, S_{inorg} initial and S_{org} initial equal to their correspondence S_t, S_{inorg} and S_{org} in APF sample.

**Fig. 1.** DTG curves of samples: (A) "M.Iztok"; (B) "B.Dol"; (C) and (D) "Pirin".**Table 3**
Characteristics of combustion.

Sample	T _{ign} (°C)	T _{max} (°C)	T _{ec} - T _{ign} (°C)	R _{max} (%/min)	t _q [min (') s (")]	T _{sh} (°C)	T _{ec} (°C)
M.Iztok	262	351	224	0.36	35' 6"	222	486
M.Iztok-R	200	283	249	0.84	34' 36"	213	449
M.Iztok-B	215	349	274	1.07	35' 30"	185	489
B.Dol	275	393	208	0.36	34' 24"	235	483
B.Dol-R	250	373	232	0.36	34' 54"	219	482
B.Dol-F	250	366	249	0.37	34' 48"	220	499
Pirin	258	384	262	0.64	22' 36"	256	520
Pirin-APF	250	424	294	0.69	26' 12"	220	544
Pirin-APF-PC	242	423	318	0.62	30' 42"	194	560
Pirin-APF-SS	250	395	300	0.69	26' 12"	199	550

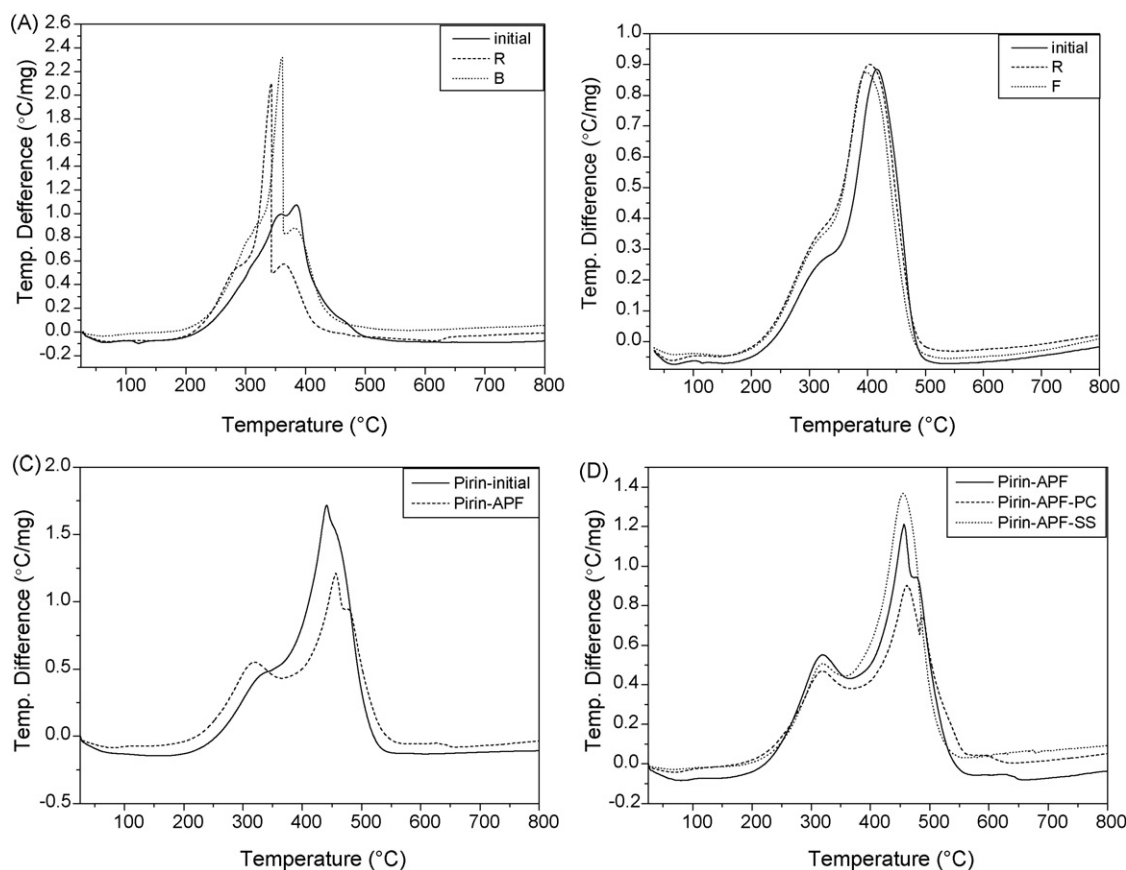


Fig. 2. DTA curves of samples: (A) "M.Iztok"; (B) "B.Dol"; (C) and (D) "Pirin".

164 tional volatile organic matter during biotreatment. The curves of all
165 all samples demonstrate the major peaks of weight loss in the range
166 350–400 °C. There is a general trend that the peak maximum of
167 all biotreated samples is shifted to lower temperatures (Fig. 1A–D,
168 Table 3). After peak temperature of maximum weight loss rate for
169 "Pirin" samples additional peaks are found which are referred to
170 "delayed burnout". This behavior can be associated with a more
171 difficult burning of lower reactivity char combustibles [24].

172 The most thermal changes in biotreated coals are registered as
173 a result of oxidation by microorganisms *Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans*
174 and *Pseudomonas putida* on a lignite sample "M.Iztok" from
175 one side and from other, first after action on subbituminous "Pirin"
176 coal by diluted mineral acids and second by microbial treatment
177 with *Sulfolobus solfataricus* strain on ash pyrite free "Pirin" sample.
178 After running microbial and chemical oxidation processes a new
179 peak of devolatilization appears with a maximum round 270 °C.
180 This observation can assign to the new compounds formed and it
181 is in agreement by the investigation of other authors [9].

182 Concerning the DTG profiles of samples "B.Dol" (initial, R and
183 F) in Fig. 1B it is shown that only the main peak at round 400 °C is
184 shifted at lower temperature region for the biotreated samples and
185 no additional peaks appeared.

186 Fig. 2A–D of DTA profiles visualize the evolution of heat flow
187 with elevated temperatures. First part of DTA curves corresponds to
188 a global endothermic process, which is a result of water adsorption
189 (endothermic) and oxidation reactions (exothermic). This thermal
190 interval finishes when oxidation reactions predominate and energetic
191 balance begins to be exothermic, at the temperature of self-heating
192 (T_{sh}). After that combustion process follows with two stages of
193 volatile matter releasing and coal char combustion. They comprise
194 first period of increasing rate of heat loss where one or two combined
195 exothermic peaks appear due to the combustion of

196 the volatile matter and heat releasing. The exothermic maximum is
197 attained when a burning of the residual solid is occurred in the stage
198 of coal char combustion. A rapid diminishing of the rate of heat flow
199 follows (Fig. 2A–D) and temperature differences of DTA curves pass
200 to the last endothermic region of the global combustion process.
201 Different coals under study and their biodesulphurized solid prod-
202 ucts demonstrate different DTA patterns in the global combustion
203 process.

204 For lignite "M.Iztok" initial (Fig. 2A) the large shoulder covers
205 the exothermic region to the first exothermic peak near 350 °C
206 corresponds to a volatile matter releasing stage. This shoulder at
207 biotreated samples R and B for the same "M.Iztok" lignite is shifted
208 to lower temperatures. Next combustion stage, namely coal char
209 combustion, includes a sharp exothermic maximum for biotreated
210 lignite shifted also to lower temperatures in comparison to the
211 exothermic maximum of initial lignite.

212 Concerning the thermal behaviour of subbituminous "B.Dol" ini-
213 tial coal, since the volatile matter is released a smooth increasing
214 in weight loss and released heat of strong exothermic effect are
215 shown in Figs. 1B and 2B. The global shape of two figures is close
216 and after biotreatments the general view of DTG and DTA profiles is
217 retained. Only the T_{max} around 400 °C of both curves for biotreated
218 "B.Dol" samples is shifted to lower temperature region near 370 °C.

219 Thermal behaviour of "Pirin" samples is visualized separately
220 for samples after preliminary chemical treatment (Figs. 1C and 2C)
221 and the samples after biodesulphurization (Figs. 1D and 2D). On
222 DTA profile (Fig. 2C) an exothermic shoulder on an exothermic peak
223 maximum near 420 °C is found. The first shoulder corresponds to
224 volatile matter releasing stage and the main peak to char combus-
225 tion stage. After chemical treatment for ash pyrite free coal sample
226 the released heat of the first exothermic shoulder transforms to a
227 well defined exothermic peak near 300 °C. The exothermic maxi-

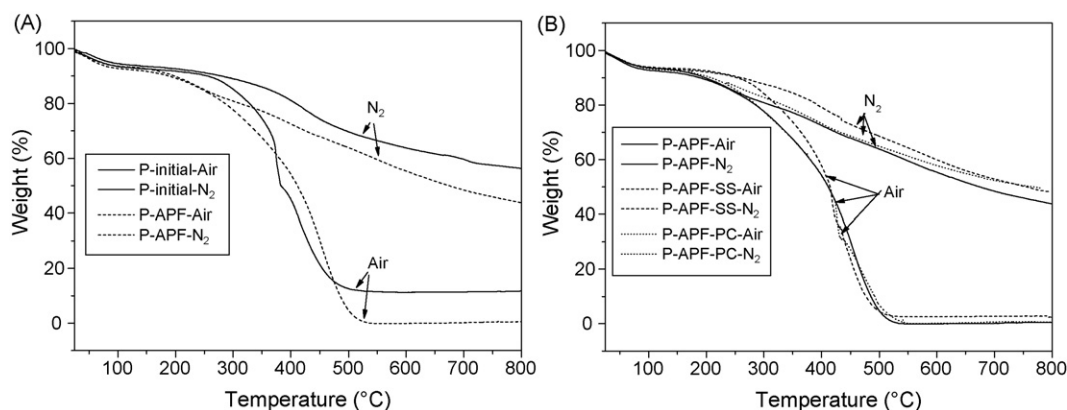


Fig. 3. (A and B) TG curves of "Pirin" coal samples in air and N₂.

228 mum is shifted to about 450 °C and a new small exothermic peak
229 round 480 °C follows. The last exothermic peak can connect with
230 some lower reactivity char combustibles additional produced by
231 biotreatments. In Fig. 2D the thermal heating profiles of biotreated
232 "Pirin" coal are visualized. The peak maxima of these DTA curves
233 are almost on the same position of which it can be concluded that
234 organic sulphur biodesulphurization do not change in any drastic
235 manner the thermal behaviour of biotreated "Pirin" ash pyrite free
236 (APF) samples.

237 3.3. Characteristic parameters from combustion

238 The ignition is an important preliminary step in the coal combus-
239 tion process due to its influence on the formation and emission
240 of pollutants, flame stability and flame extinction. Therefore the
241 ignition behaviour of coal is of considerable importance of control-
242 ling the combustion process. Ignition is the substantial burning of
243 coal particles or evolved volatile matter. Hence, an ignition temper-
244 ature is either the minimum gas temperature or the temperature
245 at which the coal particles ignite. As it is reported [25] the igni-
246 tion temperature and mechanism are not inherent properties of
247 coal. They depend on the type of test apparatus and the operating
248 conditions employed. Therefore, the ignition temperature of a fuel
249 should be determined under conditions similar to those in which it
250 is used. For comparative investigations of different fuel samples
251 it is not necessary, but the conditions must be the same for all
252 analysis.

253 To our knowledge there is not a standard method for deter-
254 mining coal ignition temperature. Thermogravimetric ignition
255 measurement is employed often, because it allows a comparison
256 of coal ignition with ignition of treated coals under well-defined
257 conditions. The experiments are usually performed for small, finely
258 milled samples and at slow heating rate.

259 Tognotti et al. [17] used thermogravimetric (TG) equipment to
260 measure ignition temperature (T_{ign}) of coal particles. The T_{ign}
261 was taken as the temperature at which the mass loss curves in the oxida-
262 tion and pyrolysis experiments deviate. In our study T_{ign} of "Pirin"
263 samples is demonstrated in Fig. 3A. The T_{ign} data are summarized
264 in Table 3. It is obvious that after biotreatments the values of T_{ign}
265 for all samples are shifted to lower temperatures.

266 Peak temperature of maximum weight loss rate (T_{max}) is usually
267 considered as the most important feature of DTG profiles. Coals
268 with lower peak maxima temperatures generally can be ignited
269 and burned easier. In our study, the tendency is that T_{max} of all
270 biotreated coal samples are shifted to lower temperature region
271 (Table 3). Concerning T_{max} of chemical desulphurized "Pirin" ash
272 pyrite free coal there is an opposite tendency of increasing T_{max}
273 which is explained with the loss of mineral matter catalytic effect

274 on coal combustion [26]. T_{max} looks to be a very sensitive factor
275 to the type of treatment as the applied biotreatments resulted in
276 different burning profiles. A reason for shifting the T_{max} to lower
277 temperature range is due to production of more volatile matter
278 during biotreatment. It is highly expressed in the case of "M.Iztok-
279 R" sample (Tables 1 and 3).

280 Temperature of self-heating (T_{sh}) or spontaneous heating is
281 an important characteristic for the practical use as it concerns
282 the coal safely storage in coal-yards. Self-heating is the process
283 resulting in a temperature increase of a coal mass. This pheno-
284 menon is provoked by the heat-generating chemical reactions of
285 the oxidant (oxygen) and the fuel. If the generated heat is not trans-
286 mitted to the exterior, a self-heating process might take place and
287 spontaneous combustion will eventually occur. From the different
288 techniques monitoring spontaneous combustion of coal [27–29]
289 the DTA approach is broadly used as a method to trace the self-
290 heating [18]. The T_{sh} is evaluated as an indicator of the suscepti-
291 bility of coals to self-heating and spontaneous ignition. T_{sh} is the tem-
292 perature at which the rate of heat flow in the DTA curve begins to be
293 exothermic. As can be seen from Table 3 there is a clear diminishing
294 of T_{sh} for all coal samples after biotreatments and chemical treat-
295 ment for "Pirin-APF" sample also. The lowest T_{sh} value (185 °C) is
296 attained for "M.Iztok"-B sample. This means that there is a high risk
297 of autogenously heating in a stock pile of such coal and spontaneous
298 unmanageable combustion even result.

299 From the DTA curve it is also possible to determine the end
300 of combustion (T_{ec}). This is in correspondence to the temperature
301 when the rate of heat flow is zero [18]. General tendency is observed
302 for increasing T_{ec} values of bio- and chemical treated samples,
303 respectively combustion temperature interval ($T_{\text{ec}} - T_{\text{ign}}$) (Table 3).
304 This is reflected on longer necessary time shown by t_q parameter,
305 which value also increase. This observation is due to increasing the
306 amounts of fixed carbon of treated coal samples (Table 1), which
307 involves the necessities of longer combustible time to burn up more
308 amounts of carbonaceous matter.

309 Concerning applied demineralization and depyritization pro-
310 cedures [10,11] for "Pirin-APF" sample and its relation to coal
311 combustion characteristics, a clear decrease in the combustibility
312 is obtained. It is indicated by the increases in peak temperature
313 T_{max} , the end of combustion temperature T_{ec} and decreases in
314 self-heating temperature T_{sh} (Table 3). This observation can be
315 associated with removed coal mineral mass, which may play some
316 catalytic influence on coal combustion [26].

317 3.4. Energy values

318 Higher heating value (HHV) is the most important coal charac-
319 teristic, as the primary goal of coal use is as an energy source for

thermal power plants and industrial boilers. This technological fuel characteristic is determined experimentally by a bomb calorimeter [20]. It is registered that higher heating values decrease slightly for biotreated coals [Table 1]. This observation can be explained merely by biodesulphurization effects of applied microbial systems, since the ash content decreases for treated coals after cleaning procedures is not so high (max 8%). The highest decrease in calorific value is for the sample of biotreatment procedure R for “M.Iztok” coal (5.4%).

4. Conclusion

Thermal analysis is used as a preliminary evaluation of possible changes in the combustion behaviour of biotreated coal samples. TGA and DTA experiments are carried out in the present study. The burning profiles of the initial and treated coals demonstrate some small differences. The last can be related to structural changes from the biological treatments. These changes are probably due to the oxidation process provoked by the overall biological treatment. Concerning organic sulphur biodesulphurization, determined clearly for biodesulphurized ash pyrite free “Pirin” coal, there is no change in any drastic manner of thermal behaviour of these samples. In general, applied biotreatments provoke a complex influence on combustion coal behaviour. From one side for biotreated samples are observed: (i) a better ignition performance; (ii) a minor decrease in higher heating value; (iii) diminishing of peak temperature of maximum weight loss rate (T_{max}). From the other side some decrease in the combustibility are obvious: (i) an increase in the combustion time (t_q); (ii) an increase in the end of combustion temperature (T_{ec}); (iii) a decrease of self-heating temperature (T_{sh}); Decreasing of T_{sh} parameter after biotreatments evolves high risk of spontaneous unmanageable combustion, especially for “M.Iztok”-B sample. Nevertheless the benefits of reduced sulphur emissions must be taken into account as a serious advantage for general evaluation of the process.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Dr. G. Dinler-Doganay and Dr. A. Dumanli for their help to carry out some biotreatments. The study is supported by the National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science, Bulgaria (Project Ref. VU-EEC-304/07) and BAS-Bulgarian bilateral Projects with FWO-Flanders and TUBITAC-Sabancı University.

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