

Alkaline - earth metal carbonate powder

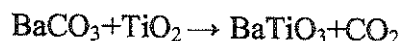
The present invention relates to alkaline - earth metal carbonate powder, method of manufacturing the same and particularly to an improved method for preparing highly crystalline alkaline - earth metal containing mixed oxide powder.

5 The industrial field where alkaline - earth metal carbonate powder, especially barium carbonate powder, is applied has recently expanded. For example, studies are being made on uses over a wide range of fields, such as starting material for high-performance dielectric, magnetic tapes, multilayer ceramic capacitors and high performance ceramics.

10 Thus barium carbonate is often used as a starting material for Perovskite-type dielectrics (BaTiO_3). Such a barium titanate powder is required to be as homogeneous as possible. In other words, the composition thereof must be homogeneous. Although barium titanate powders prepared by hydrothermal synthesis or hydrolysis show high homogeneity, the powders are expensive and
15 often possess low density, thus making them not suitable for thin dielectric film application. Thus, barium titanate powders have generally been prepared by a solid-phase reaction.

As shown in the following reaction formula 1, in the synthesis of barium titanate by the solid-phase reaction, powdered barium carbonate and powdered
20 titanium oxide are mixed and the mixture is calcined at a temperature of 1000 to 1200°C, to produce a barium titanate dielectric material :

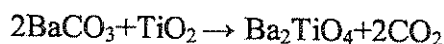
Reaction Formula 1 :



25 In this case, barium carbonate decomposes starting at about 700°C to produce BaO having high ionicity and this BaO diffuses into a TiO_2 particle to produce barium titanate.

When diffusion of BaO into the TiO_2 is not fast enough, locally higher than stoichiometric ratios between Ba and Ti are achieved and the solid-phase reaction may involve the formation of Ba_2TiO_4 as side product, according to the
30 following reaction formula 2 :

Reaction Formula 2 :



The Ba_2TiO_4 then slowly reacts with TiO_2 to transform in BaTiO_3 , and higher calcination temperatures are required for completely transforming this intermediate. The presence of even small amounts of Ba_2TiO_4 in final barium titanate has to be avoided, as it negatively affects the manufacture of multilayer ceramic capacitors therefrom.

Also, to cope with the requirement for higher capacitance or smaller size of a ceramic capacitor, there was a demand for fine particulate barium titanate and heretofore, investigations have been made for forming fine particles of titanium oxide and barium carbonate as starting materials under the form of a mechanical mixture. The fine particle has not been clearly defined so far but, in general, indicates a fine particle having a primary particle size of about $0.3\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ or less.

However, while barium titanate is synthesized at temperature of about 1000°C or more, both titanium oxide and barium carbonate are coarsened and sintered at about 800°C : thus raw material particles having a particle size of $0.3\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ or less undertake vigorous growth in the vicinity of the above-described reaction temperature of 800°C .

US patent 6,728,094 (to MURATA MANUFACTURING Co., Ltd.) provides for a titanium oxide powder holding a barium compound on the surface of the particles thereof, used in combination with a barium carbonate powder for manufacturing a highly crystalline fine barium titanate powder by solid-phase reaction. The barium compound on the surfaces of the titanium oxide powder particles inhibits the sintering, or the growth, of the titanium oxide during the calcination. Nevertheless, high calcination temperatures (about 1000°C) are required to prepare the barium titanate.

International application WO 01/10781 discloses a method for preparing a precursor for the thermal synthesis of BaTiO_3 , in which carbonate slurry of Ba and/or Sr, containing NH_4OH at a pH ranging from 9.5 to 12.0 is contacted with a Ti-containing solution for obtaining a precipitate. A further step involves dispersion of said precipitate into an alcohol, addition of hydroxypropylcellulose, and dehydration of the same to form a second powder. This second powder is thermally treated at high temperature to yield BaTiO_3 powder.

Thus, main drawbacks of techniques of the prior art are that the solid-phase reaction shall be carried out at temperature of at least 1000°C to obtain quantitative transformation of Ba and Ti precursors in BaTiO_3 : the process is thus highly energy-demanding. Moreover, uncontrolled sintering of raw

materials occurs at this high reaction temperature, thus disadvantageously failing in contributing to the formulation of fine particulate barium titanate.

According to the disclosure, the above-mentioned difficulties are remarkably overcome by the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder comprising a core of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate and a shell of at least one Group IV transition metal compound, capable of being advantageously used in the method of manufacturing a mixed oxide of an alkaline-earth metal and a Group IV transition metal by solid-phase reaction.

According to a first aspect, there is provided an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder comprising: a core consisting essentially of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate, said core having an average diameter of at most 0.25 μm ; and a shell consisting essentially of at least one Group IV transition metal compound.

Another object of the disclosure is to provide a method of manufacturing an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder comprising a core of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate and a shell of at least one Group IV transition metal compound.

According to a second aspect, there is provided a method of manufacturing an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder, said method comprising: mixing particles of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate, a solvent and at least one Group IV transition metal-containing material at least partially soluble in the solvent to form an alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry, said alkaline-earth metal carbonate having an average particle size of at most 0.25 μm ; heating said slurry at a temperature from 20 to 200°C; and removing the solvent from the slurry so that the Group IV transition metal compound is present on the surface of the alkaline-earth metal carbonate particles.

According to a third aspect, there is provided a method of manufacturing a mixed oxide of an alkaline-earth metal and a Group IV transition metal by solid-phase reaction, comprising heating an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder as defined above, or obtained from the process as defined above, optionally mixed with at least one Group IV transition metal compound, at a temperature of at least 500°C.

When the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder comprising a core of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate and a shell of at least one Group IV transition metal compound is used for manufacturing a mixed oxide by solid-phase reaction, calcinating temperature can be advantageously reduced. Consequently, the resulting mixed oxide powder is highly crystalline and fine. In the case the mixed oxide is barium titanate, to

the purposes of this invention, the term highly crystalline is to be intended as designating BaTiO_3 , having a tetragonality value (c/a axial ratio) of at least 1.004.

The c/a axial ratio of the lattice parameters c and a of tetragonal BaTiO_3 can be notably determined by X-ray diffraction and Rietveld analysis.

Accordingly, it is still an object of the present invention to provide a method of manufacturing a mixed oxide of an alkaline-earth metal and a Group IV transition metal by solid-phase reaction.

Brief description of the figures

Figure 1 : X-ray diffraction spectrum of the calcined powder of example 1.

Figure 2 : Magnification of the X-ray spectrum of the calcined powder of example 2 in the spectral region between $2\theta = 25$ and $2\theta = 38$

Figure 3 : X-ray diffraction spectrum of the titanium-coated barium carbonate powder of example 3.

Figure 4 : X-ray diffraction spectrum of the calcined powder of example 3

Figure 5 : Tg scan of core-shell powder of example 4

Figure 6 : X-rays diffraction spectra for calcined product from example 5, after heat treatment; 6(a) for 2 hours at 700°C , 6(b) for 2 hours at 800°C .

Figure 7 : Tg scan of core-shell powder of comparative example 7

The alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder of the present invention comprises :

- a core consisting essentially of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate,
5 said core having an average diameter of at most 0.25 μm ; and
- a shell consisting essentially of at least one Group IV transition metal compound.

Within the context of the present invention, the term “powder” possesses its conventional meaning, i.e. designates a solid substance in the form of tiny
10 loose particles.

The core has preferably an average diameter of at most 0.20 μm , most preferably of at most 0.15 μm , most preferably of at most 0.10 μm .

The term “average diameter of the core” is intended to denote the average value of the diameters of cross-sectional areas, associated to each of the possible
15 differently oriented cross-sections of the cores of the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder. The diameter of a cross-sectional area is defined as the diameter of the smallest circle which the cross-sectional area can be comprised in.

Average diameter of the core of the powder of the invention may be
20 preferably determined by SEM microscopy and image recognition on samples of the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder.

Average diameter is calculated by measuring surface area of cores having maximal dimension within relevant values with respect to the total area of cores in the sample analyzed by SEM microscopy and image recognition. On such
25 basis a weighted average is thus determined.

Advantageously, the powder of the invention has an average particle size from 0.01 to 0.5 μm , preferably from 0.02 to 0.25 μm , more preferably from 0.03 to 0.1 μm .

The average particle size of the powder of the invention can be measured
30 by X-ray monitoring of gravity sedimentation according to ASTM B761-97.

Advantageously, the alkaline -earth metal carbonate powder has a specific surface area BET of 1 to 100 m^2/g , preferably of 5 to 60 m^2/g , more preferably from 10 to 50 m^2/g .

The specific surface area can be measured as per the Brunauer, Emmett
35 and Teller (BET) method of calculation, according to ISO 9277, using nitrogen.

The shell consisting essentially of Group IV transition metal compound advantageously takes the form of a material disposed on the core, preferably completely surrounding (e.g., encapsulating) the core. Still, it is possible for production processes to result in particles wherein the shell does not completely surround the core, but only partially covers the core, leaving a portion of the core exposed. These particles, if produced, will typically be present in relatively small amounts, typically less than 10 % compared to core/shell particles where the shell does completely surround or encapsulate the core.

The term "at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate" is understood to mean that the core may consist essentially of one or more than one alkaline-earth carbonate.

Similarly, the term "at least one Group IV transition metal compound" is understood to mean that the shell may consist essentially of one or more than one Group IV transition metal compound.

The core and/or the shell of the powder of the invention may further comprise other cations and/or anions, moisture, additives and other ingredients which are used in the manufacturing process. Said components are generally present in reduced amount, typically as traces, and do not interfere with the properties and chemical behavior of the powder of the invention.

The powder according to the invention preferably comprises a core consisting essentially of at least one carbonate chosen among the group consisting of magnesium carbonate, calcium carbonate, strontium carbonate, barium carbonate, and mixtures thereof. More preferably, it comprises a core consisting essentially of barium or strontium carbonate, or of a mixture thereof. Most preferably it comprises a core consisting essentially of barium carbonate.

The powder of the invention advantageously comprises a shell consisting of at least one compound chosen among the group consisting of titanium compounds, zirconium compounds, hafnium compounds and mixtures thereof. More preferably it comprises a shell consisting essentially of at least one titanium compound.

Typically, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to the invention preferably comprises a shell consisting of a Group IV transition metal compound, wherein part of the Group IV transition metal compound is a reaction product of the Group IV transition metal compound with the alkaline – earth metal carbonate at the surface of the particles of the powder of the invention.

Advantageously, when the Group IV transition metal compound is a titanium compound, the shell comprises TiO_2 , in amorphous and/or crystalline form. Preferably, the shell comprises TiO_2 in an at least partially crystalline form.

- 5 The Group IV transition metal content in the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to the invention is advantageously of at least 0.001, preferably of at least 0.01, more preferably of at least 0.1 mol per mol of alkaline-earth metal.

- 10 The Group IV transition metal content in the powder according to the invention is advantageously of at most 1.5, preferably of at most 1.05, more preferably of at most 1.03 mol per mol of alkaline-earth metal.

Advantageously, the Group IV transition metal content in the powder of the invention is in the range of 0.001 to 1.05 mol per mol of alkaline-earth metal.

- 15 Very satisfactory results were obtained with Group IV transition metal content in the powder of the invention of 0.95 to 1.02 mol per mol of alkaline-earth metal.

- 20 The powder of the invention may further comprises at least one other layer of a third material which can be the same or different from the materials of the core and of the shell. For instance, the core may comprise a further coating consisting essentially of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate, either completely surrounding (e.g., encapsulating) or partially covering the powder. Optionally, the powder of the invention may be further coated with a suitable coating additive, such as a dispersing agent, a stabilizer, an antistatic agent and the like.

- 25 Preferably the powder of the invention consists essentially of a core and a shell as above defined.

Another object of the invention is a method of manufacturing an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder.

- 30 The alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to the invention can be prepared by any suitable manufacturing method, well known to those skilled in the art. The process of the invention is particularly adapted to the manufacture of the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder as above described.

The process of the invention comprises :

- 35 – mixing particles of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate, a solvent and at least one Group IV transition metal-containing material at least partially soluble in the solvent to form an alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry, said

alkaline-earth metal carbonate having an average particle size of at most 0.25 μm ;

- heating said slurry at a temperature from 20 to 200°C; and
- removing the solvent from the slurry so that the Group IV transition metal compound is present on the surface of the alkaline-earth metal carbonate particles.

In the process according to the invention, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate particles may be notably mixed to the other components to yield the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry either as dry particles or as suspension in a solvent.

It is to be understood that the steps above mentioned of mixing and heating can be realized sequentially, first mixing and then heating, or simultaneously, i.e. carrying out the mixing under heating at a temperature between 20 and 200°C.

Preferably the alkaline-earth metal carbonate is magnesium, calcium, strontium or barium carbonate, or a mixture thereof. Preferably, it is barium or strontium carbonate, or a mixture thereof. More preferably it is barium carbonate.

For the purpose of the invention the term "particle" is intended to denote a mass of material that has a definite three-dimensional volume and shape, characterized by three dimensions.

The alkaline-earth metal carbonate has an average particle size of preferably at most 0.20 μm , more preferably of at most 0.175 μm , most preferably of at most 0.15 μm , most preferably at most 0.10 μm .

Alkaline - earth metal carbonates having an average particle size from 0.04 to 0.25 μm gave very satisfactory results. Excellent results have been obtained with alkaline-earth metal carbonate having an average particle size from 40 to 100 nm.

The average particle size can be measured by X-ray monitoring of gravity sedimentation according to ASTM B761-97.

Advantageously, the alkaline - earth metal carbonate has a specific surface area of at least 5 m^2/g , preferably of at least 7 m^2/g , more preferably of at least 10 m^2/g .

Advantageously, the alkaline -earth metal carbonate has a specific surface area of at most 100 m^2/g , preferably of at most 60 m^2/g , more preferably of at most 50 m^2/g .

The specific surface area can be measured as per the Brunauer, Emmett and Teller (BET) method of calculation, according to ISO 9277, using nitrogen.

Alkaline – earth metal carbonates having a specific surface area from 15 to 40 m²/g gave very satisfactory results.

5 Thanks to the small particle size of the alkaline-earth carbonate, and optionally in addition to the high surface area of the same, the process of the invention is advantageously effective in providing highly reactive core-shell powder for preparing mixed oxide. Thus lower calcinating temperature can be used and pure mixed oxides are formed with no substantial side-product.

10 When the alkaline-earth carbonate has an average particle size exceeding 0.25 µm, the process of the invention fails to yield suitable precursors for preparing mixed oxide. In particular when the alkaline-earth carbonate is BaCO₃ and the Group IV transition metal-containing material is a Ti-containing material, coarse BaCO₃, having an average particle size exceeding 0.25 µm fails to efficiently react with the Ti compound during the calcinating step to prepare BaTiO₃ and undesirable side-products like Ba₂TiO₄ are formed.

The solvent may be water or an organic solvent, such as alcohols. Preferably the solvent is water or ethanol, more preferably is water.

20 The Group IV transition metal-containing material should be at least partially soluble in the solvent. When the Group IV transition metal is titanium, examples of suitable at least partially soluble materials are titanium halides, like titanium tetrachloride; titanium oxy-halides like TiOCl₂, titanium oxy-compounds, e.g. titanyl salts, such as titanyl sulphate (TiOSO₄), titanium alkoxides, like titanium tetra-methoxide, titanium tetra-ethoxide, titanium tetra-allyloxide, titanium tetra-*n*-propoxide, titanium tetra-isopropoxide, titanium tetra-*n*-butoxide, titanium tetra-isobutoxide, titanium tetra-*sec*-butoxide, titanium tetra-*tert*-butoxide, titanium tetra-*n*-pentoxide, titanium tetra-cyclopentyloxide, titanium tetra-*n*-hexyloxide, titanium tetra-cyclohexyloxide, titanium tetra-benzyloxide, titanium tetra-*n*-octyloxide, titanium tetra-2-ethylhexyl-oxide and titanium tetra-isooctyloxide; titanium alkoxy-halides having the formula Ti(OR)_nX_{4-n}, where R may be alkyl, alkenyl, or aryl, and X is F, Cl, Br, or I and n is an integer from 1 to 3; titanium hydroxycarboxylic acid complexes, like titanium lactate and titanium bis-ammonium lactate dihydroxide ; alkaline-stable ammonium or metal titanium tartrates, malates and citrates, like M_yTiO(citrate)_x, where M is NH₄, Na, K, Ca, or Ba and x and y are independently an integer 30 chosen for satisfying neutrality; titanium β-diketone chelates, like Ti(acac)₂(X)₂,

where acac is the acetylacetonate ligand and X is methoxy, ethoxy, isopropoxy, *n*-butoxy, or chloro; metal titanates, like Na_2TiO_3 , $\text{Na}_4\text{TiO}_4 \cdot 0.32 \text{ H}_2\text{O}$, $\text{Na}_2\text{TiO}_3 \cdot 1.45 \text{ H}_2\text{O}$, Li_2TiO_3 , K_2TiO_3 , CaTiO_3 , SrTiO_3 , BaTiO_3 .

Preferably, the titanium compound is a titanium tetrahalide, a titanium oxy-
5 halide, a titanium alkoxide, a titanium alkoxy-halide or a titanium hydroxycarboxylic acid complex. More preferably, the titanium compound is titanium tetrachloride.

In the process according to the invention, the Group IV transition metal-
containing material may be notably mixed to the other components to yield the
10 alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry either as pure (neat) compound or in solution with a solvent.

The term "Group IV transition metal-containing material at least partially
soluble in the solvent" is understood to mean that the Group IV transition metal-
containing material and the solvent are chosen so as to be able to yield a solution
15 having a concentration of at least 0.01 M of Group IV transition metal material in the solvent.

Advantageously, the alkaline-earth carbonate slurry also comprises an acid
or a base to adjust the pH and, optionally, to control the hydrolysis and
precipitation of the Group IV transition metal compound. Suitable acids or bases
20 are well known in the art. Examples of acids and bases which can be used in the process according to the inventions are notably HCl, carboxylic acids, such as acetic acid, NaOH, NH_4OH , ammonium salts like NH_4X (X= halogen atom), urea, trialkylamines such as triethylamine, and corresponding alkylammonium salts, alkyl-alkanolamine, such as triethanolamine, dimethylethanolamine and
25 corresponding alkyl-alkanolammonium salts. Preferably the slurry comprises a base chosen among NaOH and NH_4OH .

The alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry has a pH of advantageously at
least about 6, preferably of at least about 7.

The alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry has a pH of advantageously at
30 most about 12, preferably of at most about 11, more preferably at most about 10.

Good results were obtained when the pH of the slurry was comprised
between about 7 and about 10.

Optionally, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry further comprises a
dispersing agent. Preferably, the dispersing agent is present in a concentration
35 from 5 to 10 000 ppm, preferably from 10 to 5 000 ppm in the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry. Preferably, the dispersing agent is a polyacrylic acid, an

ammonium polymethylmethacrylate, an alkyl phenol ethoxylate, a polyhydroxystearic acid, a polylactone, a poly(diallyldimethylammonium chloride), a polyethylenimine, a poly(styrenesulphonate), a poly(allylaminechloride). More preferably, the dispersing agent is chosen in the group consisting of polyacrylic acid, ammonium polymethylmethacrylate, 5 poly(styrenesulphonate), and mixtures thereof.

The alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry comprising the solvent, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate and the partially soluble Group IV transition metal compound is heated at a temperature of preferably from 20 to 150°C, more 10 preferably from 20 to 100°C.

Advantageously, the above mentioned alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry is heated for at least 15 minutes, preferably for at least 30 minutes, more preferably for at least 1 hour.

Advantageously, the above mentioned alkaline-earth metal carbonate 15 slurry is heated for at most 12 hours, preferably for at most 6 hours, more preferably for at most 5 hours.

Should the Group IV transition metal compound precipitate from the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry onto the alkaline-earth metal carbonate particles, the solvent and other soluble constituents may be advantageously 20 removed from the powdered mixture by methods well-known in the art, like, for example, filtration, centrifugation, settlement and decantation and the like, to separate out a powdered mixture.

Should the Group IV transition metal compound remain soluble or partially soluble in the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry, the solvent and other volatile 25 constituents are advantageously removed from the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry by methods well known in the art, like, for example, spray drying, to separate out a powdered mixture.

The alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder is advantageously dried after synthesis, by heating at temperatures from 25 to 300°C, preferably from 40 to 30 250°C, more preferably from 50 to 150°C.

Optionally, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder can be dried by freeze drying technique, well-known to those skilled in the art.

Optionally, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder can be further pulverized with a dry mill or the like, to achieve the required particle size.

35 According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry further comprises a stabilizing agent for the Group IV

transition metal-containing material. Such stabilizing agents advantageously inhibit hydrolysis of the Group IV transition metal-containing material and/or stabilize solutions of said materials.

Such stabilizers for the Group IV transition metal-containing material are
5 well-known in the art.

Suitable stabilizers are notably chosen from the group consisting of :

- urea;
- amines of formula NH_xR_{3-x} , wherein R is an alkyl, alkanol or aryl group,
linear or branched, substituted or not, and x is an integer comprised between 0
10 and 3;
- peroxocompounds, such as hydrogen peroxide, carboxylic peroxyacids and
the like;
- chelating ligands chosen among bi- or polydentate organic ligands; examples
of suitable chelating ligands are notably diols and polyols; α -
15 hydroxycarboxylic acids like lactic acid, malic acid, tartaric acid, citric acid;
di- or poly-carboxylic acids, like oxalic acid; β -ketoesters, like
ethylacetoacetate; β -diketones, like acetylacetone;
- and mixtures thereof.

Very good results have been obtained with urea and hydrogen peroxide;
20 hydrogen peroxide gave excellent results.

The resulting alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder comprising a core of
at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate and a shell of at least one Group IV
transition metal compound can be advantageously used for preparing a highly
crystalline mixed oxide.

25 Thus is still an object of the invention a method of manufacturing a mixed
oxide, preferably a highly crystalline mixed oxide, of an alkaline-earth metal and
a Group IV transition metal by solid-phase reaction, comprising heating an
alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to the invention, at a
temperature of at least 500°C.

30 The powder according to the invention is optionally mixed with at least
one Group IV transition metal compound, such as titanium oxide, to prepare a
powder mixture. If wet blending is applied for preparing the powder mixture,
the powder is advantageously dried before use.

Advantageously, the powder according to the invention, optionally in
35 powder mixture with a Group IV transition metal compound, is calcined, e.g., in
a batch furnace, to synthesize the mixed oxide.

The powder of the invention or the powder mixture as above described is heated at a temperature of preferably at least 600°C, more preferably 650°C.

Advantageously, the powder of the invention or the powder mixture as above described is heated at a temperature of at most 1000°C, preferably at most 900°C, more preferably at most 850°C.

Advantageously, the powder of the invention or the powder mixture as above described is heated for at least 30 minutes, preferably for at least 1 hour.

Advantageously, the powder of the invention or the powder mixture as above described is heated for at most 12 hours, preferably for at most 6 hour.

In this instance, the core-shell structure of the alkaline – earth metal carbonate powder of the invention notably inhibits the sintering, the growth of the particles and enables reaction taking place at lower temperatures, thus advantageously leading to a highly crystalline fine mixed oxide powder.

When the alkaline-earth metal carbonate is BaCO₃ and the Group IV transition metal is titanium, the highly crystalline fine mixed oxide powder of BaTiO₃ advantageously has a tetragonality value (c/a axial ratio) of at least 1.004.

The highly crystalline mixed oxides obtained by means of the process according to the invention are advantageously used as starting material for high-performance dielectric, especially multi-layer capacitors.

Multilayer ceramic capacitors comprising laminated dielectric layers are preferably prepared by forming into a sheet a barium titanate-containing powder prepared from the alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder of the invention and by sintering the sheet.

The present invention is described in greater detail below by referring to the Examples; however, the present invention is not limited to these examples.

The BET surface area is measured as per the Brunauer, Emmett and Teller method of calculation, according to ISO 9277, using nitrogen.

Equivalent BET diameter was determined according to the following equation (equation 1) :

$$d_{\text{BET}} = \frac{6}{S.A._{\text{BET}} \times \rho}$$

where :

S.A._{BET} is the specific surface area as determined by BET method;

ρ is the density of the material measured by helium pycnometry.

X-rays analyses were performed using Co Kα radiation and Bragg-Brentano geometry.

Average diameter of the core of the core-shell powder has been determined by SEM microscopy and image recognition. Average diameter is calculated by measuring surface area of cores having maximal dimension within relevant values with respect to the total area of cores in the sample analyzed by SEM
5 microscopy and image recognition. On such basis a weighted average is thus determined.

The average particle size distributions were measured by means of an X-ray disc centrifuge (BI-XDC, Brookhaven Instruments Corporation) by X-ray monitoring of gravity sedimentation according to ASTM B761-97, after
10 dispersion of the material in water. The size corresponding to 50 % of the cumulative distribution is denoted as d_{50} and represents the mean particle size. The span of the distribution was calculated as $d_{50}/(d_{90} - d_{10})$, where d_{90} and d_{10} are size parameters directly obtained from the measured particle size distribution.

The c/a ratio of the lattice parameters c and a of tetragonal BaTiO_3 was
15 determined by X-ray diffraction and Rietveld analysis.

Thermogravimetric determinations were carried out on a Setaram (Caluire, France) mod. LabSys apparatus under a dry air flow (0.1 l/min), with a heating rate of $5^\circ\text{C}/\text{min}$, from room temperature (25°C) up to a temperature of 1300°C .

The density (ρ) of the materials was measured by helium pycnometry.

20 **Example 1**

An aqueous suspension of barium carbonate in water has been prepared by adding 29.06 g of a BaCO_3 powder sold by Solvay Bario e Derivati S.p.A. having a specific surface area BET of $31.2 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$ (corresponding to an equivalent BET diameter of 48 nm) and a d_{50} of 80 nm to 200 ml of an aqueous solution of
25 NaOH (5 M). To this suspension kept under vigorous stirring at 100°C , 27.86 g TiCl_4 , corresponding to an equimolecular amount to BaCO_3 , has been added. After 1 hour, the powder has been recovered by filtration, rinsed with water and dried.

Next, the resulting titanium-coated barium carbonate powder has been
30 calcined in a batch furnace during 2 hour at 700°C .

The calcined product has been characterized by X-ray diffraction analysis, resulting in pure BaTiO_3 . Figure 1 shows the X-ray spectrum of the so-obtained BaTiO_3 powder (relative intensity as a function of 2θ).

Example 2

The procedure of example 1 has been repeated, but an aqueous solution of NH_4OH (2.5 M) has been used as solvent, and the temperature has been kept at 80°C .

5 Next, the resulting titanium-coated barium carbonate powder has been calcined in a batch furnace during 6 hour at 700°C .

 The calcined product has been characterized by X-ray diffraction analysis, resulting pure BaTiO_3 . Figure 2 shows a magnification of the X-ray spectrum of the so-obtained BaTiO_3 powder (relative intensity as a function of 2θ) in the
10 spectral region between $2\theta = 25$ and $2\theta = 38$.

Example 3

 The procedure of example 2 has been repeated, but a commercially available polyacrylic acid has been used as dispersing agent (polyacrylic acid, 63 % aqueous solution, supplied from Acros Organics) for preparing the barium
15 carbonate dispersion.

 The titanium-coated barium carbonate powder has been characterized by X-ray diffraction analysis, confirming the presence of rutile TiO_2 crystalline phase (peak denoted with *) and anatase TiO_2 crystalline phase (peak denoted with # in Fig. 3). Figure 3 shows a magnification of the X-ray spectrum (relative
20 intensity as a function of 2θ) of the titanium-coated barium carbonate powder in the spectral region between $2\theta = 25$ and $2\theta = 38$.

 The titanium-coated barium carbonate powder has been characterized by SEM microscopy and image recognition and was found to have a core average diameter of 50 nm.

25 Next, the resulting barium carbonate powder has been calcined in a batch furnace during 4 hour at 700°C .

 The calcined product has been characterized by X-ray diffraction analysis, resulting in pure BaTiO_3 . Figure 4 shows a magnification of the X-ray spectrum (relative intensity as a function of 2θ) of the so-obtained BaTiO_3 powder in
30 the spectral region between $2\theta = 25$ and $2\theta = 38$.

 The calcined product showed a surface area S.A._{BET} of $13.78 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$, an equivalent BET diameter d_{50} of 148.0 nm and a tetragonality value (c/a axial ratio) of 1.005.

Results of determinations are listed in Table 1.

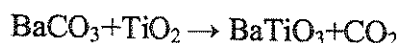
Table 1

T of thermal treatment (°C)	Holding time (hours)	Phase composition	c/a ratio	ρ (g cm ⁻³)	S.A. _{BET} (m ² g ⁻¹)	d_{BET} (nm)	d_{50} (nm)	span
700	4	BaTiO ₃	1.005	5.74	13.78	76.8	148.0	1.4

Example 4

A 30 % solution of hydrogen peroxide (21 ml) was added to a 0.13M solution of titanium tetrachloride (TiCl₄) in water (300 ml) while stirring. During preparation, the temperature of the solution was kept below 5°C. A 6M solution of ammonium hydroxide in water (about 50 ml) was slowly added to the resulting clear solution until the pH attains a value around 9. A barium carbonate (BaCO₃) powder with specific surface area of 30 m²/g (8.46 g) and a d_{50} of 80 nm was suspended in the final yellow transparent solution and the resulting suspension is then slowly heated up to a temperature 95°C. The relative amounts of barium carbonate and titanium tetrachloride corresponded to a Ba/Ti molar ratio in the suspension of 1.00. The suspension was kept at the set-point temperature of 95°C for 5 hours. The solid phase was separated from the liquid, washed with distilled water and finally dried.

The core-shell powder was submitted to thermogravimetical analysis to determine loss of weight as a function of the temperature, corresponding to the reaction :



It can be noted from the T_g scan [weight loss derivative (dtg %) as a function of T (°C)] depicted in Figure 5, that the loss of weight due to the evolution of carbon dioxide occurs shapely at a temperature of 650°C: at this temperature the reaction is thus already quantitative.

The so-obtained core-shell powder was heated in air in a batch furnace to a temperature between 650 and 800 °C. Distinct heat treatments were performed at 650, 700 and 800°C. The powder was kept at the set-point temperature for a time between 2 and 4 hours. During heating, the powder was allowed to stay at a temperature between 300 and 400 °C for a time between 1 and 8 hours.

The phase composition of the calcined powder was determined by X-ray diffraction. The calcined powder was exclusively composed of single phase barium titanate, BaTiO₃, with tetragonal crystal structure. X-rays diffraction

spectra (relative intensity as a function of 2 theta) for the calcined powder is depicted in Figure 6.

The results of analytical determinations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

T of thermal treatment (°C)	Holding time (hours)	Phase composition	c/a ratio	ρ (g cm ⁻³)	S.A.-BET (m ² g ⁻¹)	d _{BET} (nm)	d ₅₀ (nm)	span
650	4	BaTiO ₃	1.006	5.67	19.1	55	-	-
700	2	BaTiO ₃	1.006	5.73	17.4	60	140	0.9
800	2	BaTiO ₃	1.006	5.87	12.6	81	143	0.9

5 **Comparative example 5**

A barium carbonate powder holding no titanium compound on the surface was used for preparing a barium titanate powder, using as starting materials a barium carbonate (BaCO₃) powder, with specific surface area of 30 m²/g and d₅₀ of 80 nm, and a titanium dioxide (TiO₂) powder with specific surface area of 22 m²/g. These starting materials were weighed so that the Ba/Ti molar ratio was 1.00 and were mixed. The resulting mixture was sieved and heat-treated at temperatures between 650 and 800°C for times between 2 and 8h in air in a batch furnace. Distinct heat treatments were performed at 650, 700 and 800°C. The phase composition of the calcined powder was determined by X-ray diffraction.

15 The powders calcined at temperatures lower than 800°C contain, besides barium titanate, significant amounts of BaCO₃ and TiO₂. The powders calcined at 800°C for a time shorter than 8 hours contain, beside barium titanate, still measurable amounts of BaCO₃ and TiO₂. Only the powder calcined at 800°C for 8 hours was exclusively composed of single phase barium titanate, BaTiO₃, with tetragonal crystal structure. Results of analytical determinations are shown in

20 Table 2.

Table 2

T of thermal treatment (°C)	Holding time (hours)	Phase composition	c/a ratio	ρ (g cm ⁻³)	S.A.-BET (m ² g ⁻¹)	d _{BET} (nm)	d ₅₀ (nm)	span
800	8	BaTiO ₃	1.0045	5.78	9.3	112	270	1.4

Comparative example 6

The procedure of example 5 was repeated, but a barium carbonate (BaCO_3) powder with specific surface area of $2 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$ and d_{50} of 1290 nm was used.

Results obtained from different heating treatments are summarized in table 3.

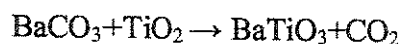
5 **Table 3**

T of thermal treatment ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)	Holding time (hours)	Phase composition
800	2	$\text{BaTiO}_3 + \text{BaCO}_3 + \text{TiO}_2$
900	2	BaTiO_3 (mainly) + $\text{BaCO}_3 + \text{TiO}_2 + \text{Ba}_2\text{TiO}_4$
1000	2	BaTiO_3

Comparative example 7

Same procedure as example 4 was repeated but using a barium carbonate (BaCO_3) powder having specific surface area of $2 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$ and d_{50} of 1290 nm, instead of the above mentioned BaCO_3 grade.

10 The core-shell powder was submitted to thermogravimetical analysis to determine loss of weight as a function of the temperature, corresponding to the reaction :



15 It can be noted from the T_g scan [weight loss derivative (dtg %) as a function of T ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)] depicted in Figure 7, that the loss of weight due to the evolution of carbon dioxide occurs within a broad temperature range, via a stepwise process which is completed only at temperature as high as 1000 $^{\circ}\text{C}$.

20 The resulting core-shell powder was heated in air in a batch furnace to a temperature 800 $^{\circ}\text{C}$. During heating, the powder was allowed to stay at a temperature between 300 and 400 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 4 hours. The powder was kept to the final heating temperature of 800 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 2 hours. The phase composition of the calcined powder was determined by X-ray diffraction. The calcined powder was found to be composed of a mixture of BaTiO_3 (mainly), BaCO_3 , TiO_2 and Ba_2TiO_4 .

CLAIMS

1 – Alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder comprising :

- a core consisting essentially of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate, said core having an average diameter of at most 0.25 μm ; and
- 5 – a shell consisting essentially of at least one Group IV transition metal compound.

2 – The alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to Claim 1, characterized in that it comprises a core consisting essentially of barium carbonate.

3 – The alkaline-earth carbonate powder according to either Claim 1 or 2,
10 characterized in that it comprises a shell consisting essentially of at least one titanium compound.

4 – The alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to one of the preceding claims, characterized in that the Group IV transition metal content is in the range of 0.001 to 1.05 mol per mol of alkaline-earth metal.

15 5 – A method of manufacturing an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder, said method comprising :

- mixing particles of at least one alkaline-earth metal carbonate, a solvent and at least one Group IV transition metal-containing material at least partially soluble in the solvent to form an alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry, said
20 alkaline-earth metal carbonate having an average particle size of at most 0.25 μm ;
- heating said slurry at a temperature from 20 to 200°C; and
- removing the solvent from the slurry so that the Group IV transition metal compound is present on the surface of the alkaline-earth metal carbonate
25 particles.

6 – The method according to Claim 5, characterized in that the alkaline-earth metal carbonate has a specific surface area of at least 5 m^2/g .

7 – The method according to Claim 5, characterized in that the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry further comprises a dispersing agent.

8 - The method according to Claim 5, characterized in that the alkaline-earth metal carbonate slurry further comprises a stabilizing agent for the Group
5 IV transition metal-containing material.

9 - The method according to Claim 8, characterized in that the stabilizing agent for the Group IV transition metal-containing material is chosen among the group consisting of :

- urea;
- 10 – amines of formula $\text{NH}_x\text{R}_{3-x}$, wherein R is an alkyl, alkanol or aryl group, linear or branched, substituted or not, and x is an integer comprised between 0 and 3;
- peroxocompounds, such as hydrogen peroxide, carboxylic peroxyacids and the like;
- 15 – chelating ligands chosen among bi- or polydentate organic ligands;
- and mixtures thereof.

10 – A method of manufacturing a mixed oxide of an alkaline-earth metal and a Group IV transition metal by solid-phase reaction, comprising heating an alkaline-earth metal carbonate powder according to any one of Claims 1 through
20 4, or obtained from the process of Claims 5 to 9, optionally mixed with at least one Group IV transition metal compound, at a temperature of at least 500°C.