



Multiproxy analytical comparison of industrially produced humic production

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Abstract:

Humic substances nowadays are not only topic of basic research, but also they are a industrially in amounts of tons produced substances, at first for application in agriculture. Considering diversity of functions there is a high potential of application of humic substances also for other aims, such as food additives, applications in cosmetics etc. The aim of the study is to compare properties of industrially produced humic substances by they origin (vermicompost, manure, sapropel, peat, coal, leonardite, water etc.). As known humic substances in the study were used potassium humates of it's nature and efectivity. Were used thirty-five industrially prouced humic substances of known origin (7 groups).The methods used for characterisation include element analysis, TOC (total organic carbon) and spectroscopic characterisation.

Conclusion:

Research shows that humic substances of soil, peat, sapropel originates is most effective in fertilizer use. Firstly, organic material consists a highest nitrogen and carbon amounts in comparison to other samples. Secondly, they contain more than 50% humic acid fraction. Thirdly, the organic structures are less degraded and more stable than product of coal or lignite originates.

The study also showed that humic substances from compost, peat, and sapropel are closest in their structure and properties to natural humic substances from the soil. However, peat and sapropel products are more environmentally friendly and natural, since the composts, widely available on the market, are produced from municipal waste or manure (animal origin).

From the point of view of fertilizer, sapropel attracts attention not only to the similarity of humic substances with natural, and its rich composition. Sapropel contains a wide range of trace elements, vitamins, proteins, amino acids and enzymes, and all of them are of natural origin.

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Research results:

Large quantities of humic substances are produced in many countries around the world and their use in various areas of the economy is developing. However, it should be noted that the structure and properties of humic substances depend on their origin. Humic substances released from the soil and compost contain the highest amount of nitrogen and carbon, so they are useful to produce fertilizer production. In some cases, high levels of contamination, such as high ash content, have been found in industrially produced humic products, reducing the quality of the product, or even limiting their intended use. The high ash content was found in product *EP*, isolated from lignite, can be explained, that product has got a high impurities content - silicates and heavy metals. The decrease of H/C atom ratio in the humic substances means the dehydrogenation of the sample (hydrogen removal from an organic compound), which could increase side reactions in soil. The obtained data from analyses are in the same range, thus all samples are stable. The increase of O/C atom ratio means the decarboxylation of organic material, too high values indicate degradation of sample. Product *BP*, *EP* and *GP* have got two times higher O/C values in comparison to others. Can be concluded that humic substances of coal, lignite and water originates are more decomposed, thus partly have lost functional properties.

As the organic carbon is an important factor in fertility (affects plant growth), it was determined in humic products. The high total organic carbon content was found in product *EP* of lignin originates and smallest value in product *GP* of water originate. By the way, using this method was found humic and fulvic acid mass percentage in samples. Knowing these properties, efficiency of product can be predicted. Humic acid have got more strong and productive functions (accumulation, regulatory, protecting, physiological functions) in soil than fulvic acid. Humic substances isolated from soil and compost partially consist of 100% humic acid, that claims about benefit of fertilizer product. However, product of coal originates consist 79% of fulvic acid, that shows low quality product.

By UV-Vis spectra have been discovered absorption ratio of humic substances at specific wavelengths (E2/E3 and E4/E6). Were relatively determined which type of product has a higher aromaticity and molecular weight, which affects the product quality. Humic substances of sapropel originates show the smallest E2/E3, that indicate a high aromatic group content. Due to these properties, substitution and attachment reactions can occur faster in the soil. Lignite and coal originate humic substances show the highest E2/E3 values, which indicate a low aromatic group content. It may be noted that the highest E4/E6 ratio has also product of sapropel, therefore has a smaller molecular mass. That formed before peat, and where the humification / polymerization process is still unfinished. Therefore, properties of product of sapropel originates could be more effective.

Table 1

Elemental composition of humic products

Product	Origin	N, %	C, %	Ash, %	H/C	O/C	TOC, mg/g	W _{FA} , TOC, %	W _{HA} , TOC, %
A	peat	3,62	44,92	5,86	1,32	0,78	37,4	54,5	55,5
B	coal	0,41	33,25	4,53	1,15	1,43	34,0	79,1	20,9
C	sapropel	3,80	45,48	9,78	1,21	0,76	52,8	43,5	56,5
D	soil	3,82	51,12	9,78	1,14	0,59	46,9	7,9	92,1
E	lignite	0,44	34,36	35,23	1,12	1,35	63,7	60,2	39,8
F	compost	3,94	50,00	8,65	1,14	0,62	45,9	10,9	89,1
G	water	1,46	34,57	1,38	1,24	1,31	27,7	24,8	75,2

*N – nitrogen content, plays an important role in plant growth, protein, nucleic acid, chlorophyll and other organic substances synthesis, determines the potential soil fertility.

*C – carbon content, the main organic element in the structure of humic substances, determines the quality of product.

*Ash –indicates contamination of samples with inorganic substances (silicates, metals, non-metals).

*H/C – hydrogen and carbon atom ratio, represents the aromaticity index.

*O/C – oxygen and carbon atom ratio, represents the number of oxygen-containing groups in the organic structure. High values indicate degradation of humic material.

*TOC – total organic carbon, an important fertility factor.

*W_{FA} – mass percentage of fulvic acid.

*W_{HA} – mass percentage of humic acid.

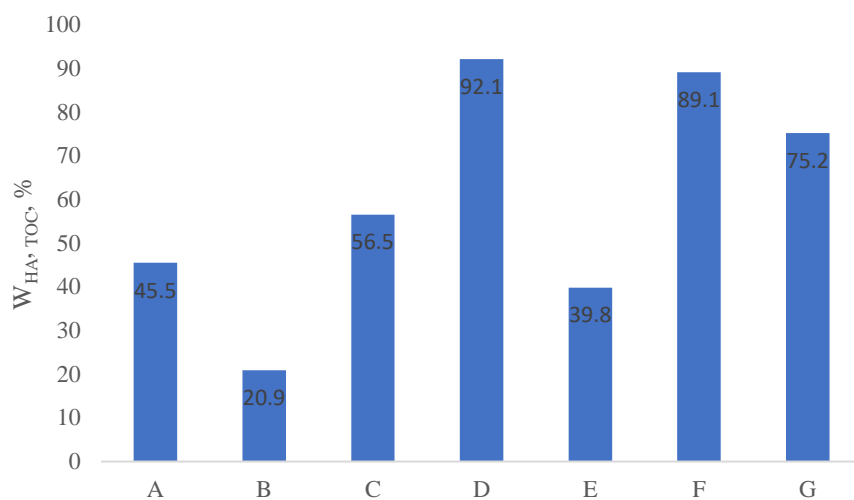


Fig. 1. Mass percentage of humic acid in humic products

Table 2

The absorption ratios of humic substances in UV-Vis spectra

Product	Origin	E2/E3	E4/E6
AP	peat	2,40	11,27
BP	coal	3,01	5,08
CP	sapropel	2,16	16,35
DP	soil	2,39	5,00
EP	lignite	3,19	5,11
FP	compost	2,39	5,00
GP	water	2,68	4,94

*E2/E3 – absorption at 250 nm and 365 nm reflects the degree of aromaticity, degradation of phenols and quinone groups in the humate structure, the lower the values, the higher the degree of aromaticity

*E4/E6 - absorbance at 465 nm and 665 nm, indicating molecular weight, condensation and maintenance of humic substances in time environment.

It has also indicated the impurity or low quality of organic matters in some products. EEM spectra provides information on the relative intensity of fluorescence of humic substances at various excitation-emission wavelengths. They make it possible to distinguish between the presence of selective and sensitive dissolved organic substances - humic acid, fulvic acid, proteins (tryptophan and tyrosine) in the sample, as well as its relative amount compared to the other fractions.

Figure 2 shows the EEM spectra of the product *AP*, where the peak α - 470/550 (Ex / Em, nm) characterizes the fraction of humic acid, peak β (350 / 520) – fulvic acid and peak γ – protein fraction. The spectra is typical for humic substances. Was observed, that peat (*AP*) and soil (*DP*) originates EEM spectra are similar, indicating the equivalence of product compositions. Figure 4 shows sapropel originates (*CP*) product contains more fulvic acid fraction in comparison to other samples.

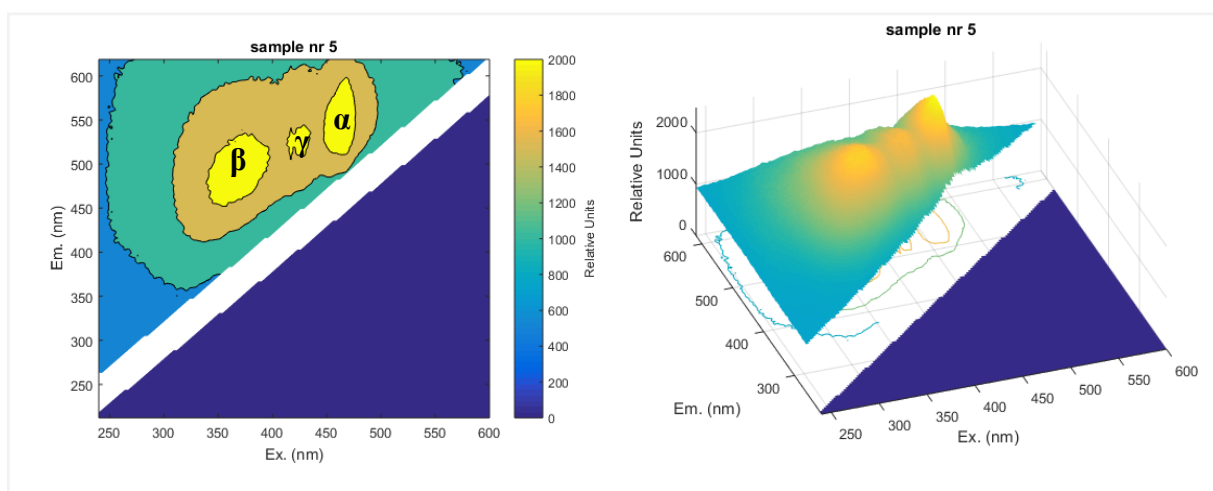


Fig. 2. *AP* product (peat originates) 2D (left) and 3D (right) EEM spectras

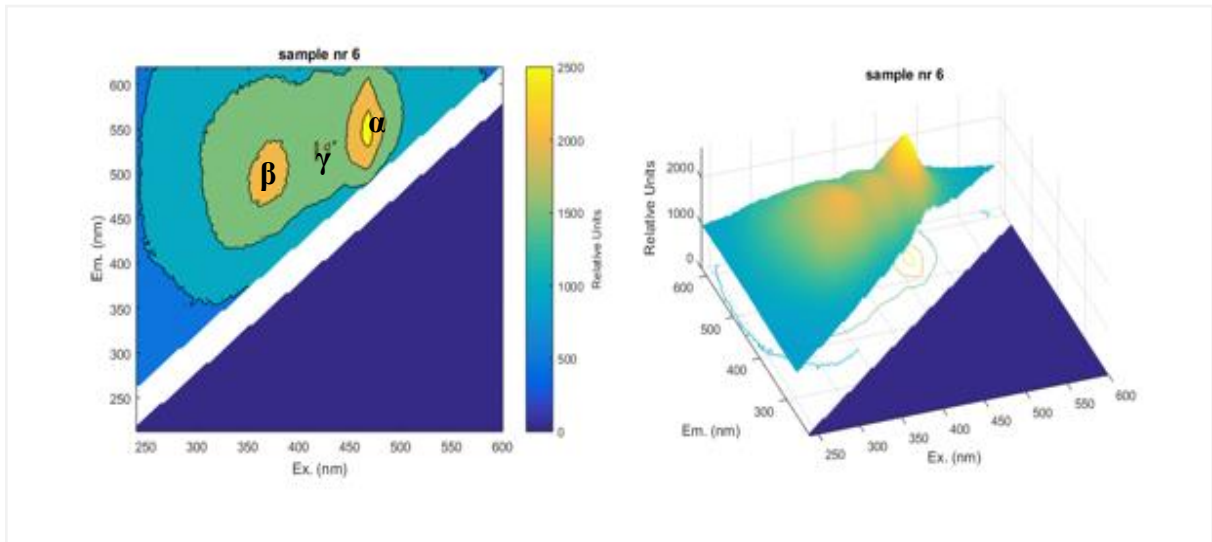


Fig. 3. DP product (soil originates) 2D (left) and 3D (right) EEM spectras

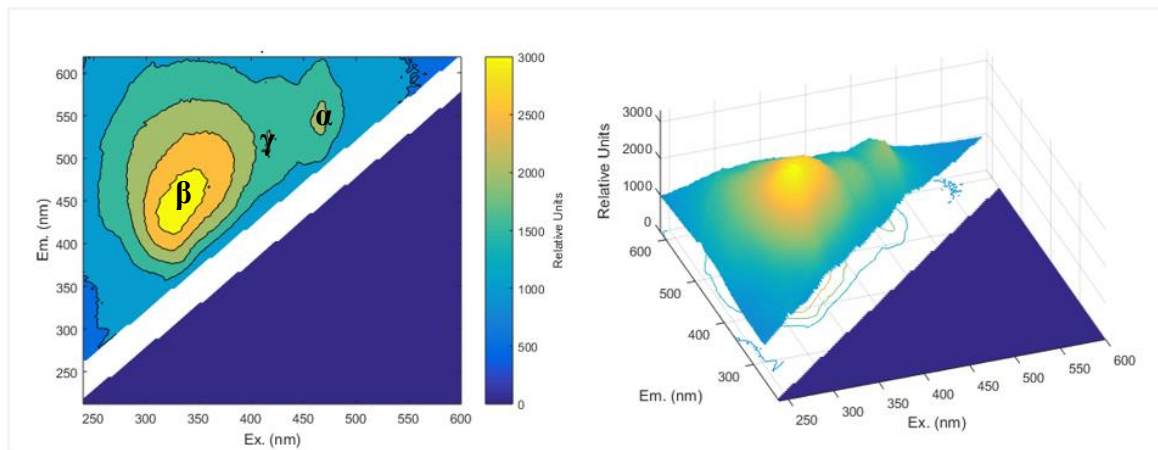


Fig. 4. CP product (sapropel originates) 2D (left) and 3D (right) EEM spectras

In some cases, the HS product does not respond to the labeled name. For example, in figure 3 you can see high quality (left side) *D* product, which contain 3 main organic fractions (humic acid, fulvic acid and protein) for humic substances. However, the product *B* lacks such properties. The manufacturer states that the HS product consists of 80-90% humic acid, but figure 3 (right side) shows a relatively high fulvic acid peak β (350/520) and almost no detectable humic acid peak α (470/550).

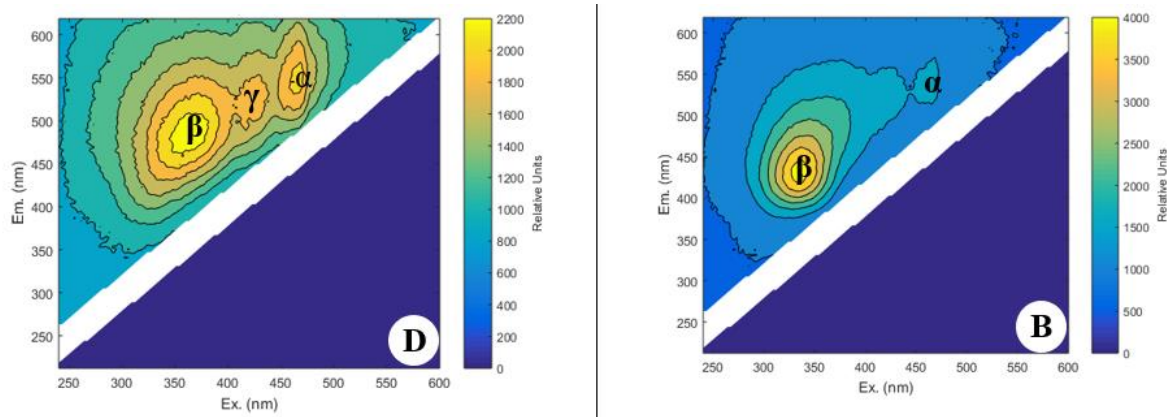


Fig. 4. 2D EEM spectra: high quality (left) – *DP* humate product (soil originates) and low quality (right) – *BP* humate product (coal originates)

Appendix 1

Table 3

Characteristic of humic substances samples for this study

Sample	Origin	Sample	Origin
A	Coal	T	Water
B	Coal	U	Coal
C	Coal	V	Peat
D	Coal	W	Coal
E	Peat	X	Water
F	Coal	Y	Water
G	Peat	Z	Water
H	Sapropel	AA	Water
J	Peat	AB	Water
K	Peat	AC	Lignite
L	Peat	AD	Coal
M	Sapropel	AE	Water
N	Peat	AF	Water

O	Soil	AG	Leaf compost
P	Peat	AH	Vermicompost
Q	Leonardite	AJ	Manure
R	Peat	AK	peat
S	Peat		

Appendix 2

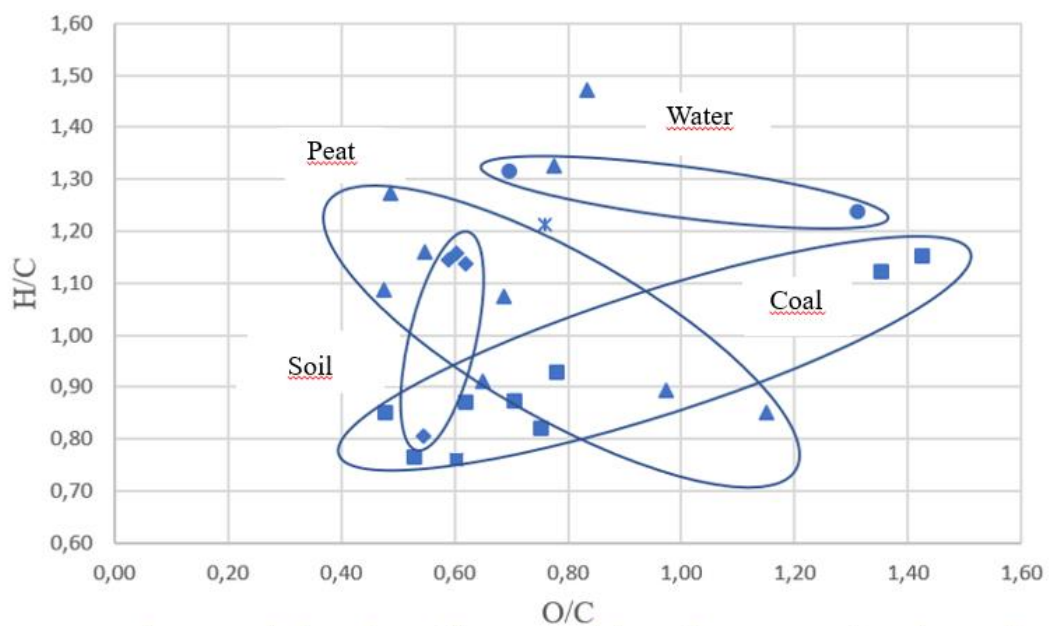
Table 4

Elemental composition of humic substances

Sample	N, %	C, %	H, %	O, %	Ash, %	H/C	O/C
A	1,20	49,03	3,59	46,18	13,69	0,87	0,71
B	1,01	47,74	3,28	47,97	18,69	0,82	0,75
C	0,96	46,71	3,64	48,69	20,49	0,93	0,78
D	1,50	52,67	3,35	42,48	5,77	0,76	0,61
F	0,89	41,78	3,13	54,20	30,68	0,89	0,97
Q	3,31	50,89	3,71	42,09	2,71	0,87	0,62
E	3,62	44,92	4,99	46,47	5,86	1,32	0,78
G	2,31	48,71	4,39	44,59	8,17	1,07	0,69
H	3,82	43,01	5,31	47,86	9,27	1,47	0,84
J	3,05	53,06	5,16	38,73	1,38	1,16	0,55

K	1,43	55,67	3,57	39,33	8,65	0,76	0,53
L	1,51	57,09	5,20	36,20	0,39	1,09	0,48
N	2,54	55,46	5,92	36,08	0,89	1,27	0,49
P	1,06	50,89	3,89	44,16	1,76	0,91	0,65
R	1,05	57,86	4,13	36,96	1,43	0,85	0,48
M	3,80	45,48	4,62	46,10	9,78	1,21	0,76
O	3,80	53,54	3,61	39,05	1,37	0,80	0,55
V	1,98	50,81	4,86	42,35	0,19	1,14	0,63
U	3,23	31,71	4,03	61,03	0,79	1,51	1,44
W	4,69	39,29	4,88	51,14	10,85	1,48	0,98
T	0,60	48,71	4,01	46,68	25,85	0,98	0,72
AC	0,44	34,36	3,23	61,97	35,23	1,12	1,35
AE	2,12	48,00	5,30	44,58	9,27	1,32	0,70
AF	1,46	34,57	3,59	60,38	1,38	1,24	1,31
AG	3,94	50,00	4,77	41,29	8,65	1,14	0,62
AH	3,69	50,64	4,91	40,76	0,39	1,16	0,60
AJ	3,82	51,12	4,91	40,15	9,78	1,14	0,59
AD	0,41	33,25	3,21	63,13	4,53	1,15	1,43

Appendix 3



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Fig. 5. Van Krevelen graph, humic acid composition elements H / C depending on O / C Ratio (Peat (▲), Coal (□), Soil (◇), Sapropel (×), Water (●))

Appendix 4

Table 5

Content of inorganic elements in humic substances - I
(aluminum, arsenic, boron, barium, beryllium, calcium, cadmium, cobalt)

Sample	Al, μg/g	As, μg/g	B, μg/g	Ba, μg/g	Be, μg/g	Ca, μg/g	Cd, μg/g	Co, μg/g
A	16360	18	14	42	<0,02	309	0,46	3,9
B	31550	23	11	42	<0,02	197	0,38	4,1
C	31390	27	12	51	0,02	322	0,52	4,4
D	3461	<2	31	61	<0,02	1806	<0,15	2,3
E	1492	1,3	14	2,6	<0,04	10384	<0,17	0,8
F	33440	26,5	24	49	4,01	9176	<0,17	12
G	762	0,7	10	<0,4	<0,04	1709	<0,17	0,7

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H	392	1,7	6	1,9	<0,04	822	<0,17	0,3
J	11090	5,5	27	<0,4	<0,04	162	<0,17	6,3
K	7140	2,2	65	4,3	<0,04	1777	<0,17	2,2
L	148	<1,6	9	<0,4	<0,02	<6	0,15	2,5
M	158	<1,6	3	<0,4	<0,02	10	<0,14	1,3
N	3850	3	<6	21,9	0,03	229	<0,15	2,4
O	16	3,1	23	0,4	<0,02	<6	0,49	8,1
Q	69	3,3	7	4,5	<0,02	511	0,14	1,0
R	2270	<1,6	24	40	<0,02	3155	0,29	0,6
U	882	<1,4	108	19	<0,04	19848	<0,18	0,6
V	40	1,4	80	<0,6	<0,04	<0,5	<0,18	<0,2
W	17	<1,6	343	<0,4	<0,02	<6	28,50	0,3
X	175	<1,6	47	5,9	0,06	2280	0,63	2,6
AA	86	<4,8	227	<1,2	<0,06	<20	<0,42	0,5
AC	10	<1,6	997	0,9	<0,02	1099	<0,14	571
AD	<1	<1,4	462	<0,6	<0,04	150	<0,18	214
AE	260	3,5	61	159	0,05	10	<0,18	3,4
AF	10790	2,7	23	153	0,16	109	<0,18	3,1
AG	1310	1,4	<9	7,3	<0,04	215	<0,18	2,8
AH	729	1,6	<9	5,3	<0,04	<0,5	<0,18	1,8
AJ	1190	1,5	<9	111	<0,04	<0,5	<0,18	5,9

Appendix 5

Table 6

Content of inorganic elements in humic substances - II
(chromium, copper, iron, potassium, magnesium, manganese, molybdenum, sodium, nickel)

Sample	Cr, µg/g	Cu, µg/g	Fe, µg/g	K, µg/g	Mg, µg/g	Mn, µg/g	Mo, µg/g	Na, µg/g	Ni, µg/g
A	34	17	8570	10000	439	6,3	9,4	1080	17
B	51	31	7440	2670	448	7,3	<0,3	78	21
C	44	21	7350	3810	562	9,0	<0,3	69	20
D	6,4	2,7	3500	8500	210	18	0,4	203	7,1
E	6,9	2,5	8400	12050	1390	88	<0,3	189	3,6

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F	51	38	11630	3020	1270	22	<0,3	25160	45
G	5,2	5,1	1230	404	136	6,9	1,4	28200	1,8
H	5,8	3,3	3510	120	54	3,9	2,1	2810	3,8
J	14	54	4990	3630	1500	19	31	2730	11
K	3,8	5,4	3340	6470	422	2,7	2,3	14500	19
L	4,6	10	91	876	<0,5	4,3	<0,4	261	4,0
M	2,0	7,6	94	753	<0,5	2,8	<0,4	189	1,6
N	21	665	3890	3540	20	8,0	0,5	33	19
O	26	295	915	658	<0,5	2,3	4,9	187	12
Q	4,7	21	2950	4030	<0,5	<0,1	24	151	17
R	52	18	1570	60	22	5,4	54	2140	34
U	0,6	0,9	792	27220	6750	37	0,8	21500	0,6
V	<0,6	<0,6	59	706	57	<0,1	0,2	478	<0,3
W	7,2	1,4	121	296	<0,5	1,4	8,1	28970	5,5
X	4,9	110	1710	287	336	14	51	12820	17
AA	2,5	17	35	105	<1,5	<0,3	5,8	1150	1,7
AC	<0,4	729	66	102200	131	673	19	43570	2,0
AD	<0,6	298	9	40610	16	240	19	16410	<0,3
AE	0,8	30	2320	726	1	3,1	2,1	4700	5,3
AF	12	31	7860	3150	1200	37	0,6	3920	6,6
AG	1,1	25	1040	2660	126	4,6	16	16	2,5
AH	0,7	21	489	1450	28	1,5	7,8	<11	0,5
AJ	20	201	1000	1470	27	0,6	7,7	<11	2,9

Appendix 6

Table 7

Content of inorganic elements in humic substances - III
(phosphorus, lead, sulfur, selenium, silicon, strontium, tungsten, zinc)

Sample	P, µg/g	Pb, µg/g	S, µg/g	Se, µg/g	Si, µg/g	Sr, µg/g	V, µg/g	Zn, µg/g
A	91	3,7	4020	<3	158	26	26	6,0
B	107	<1	3760	<3	115	25	45	13
C	108	<1	3520	<3	80	28	42	12
D	16	4,2	4660	<3	300	24	5,6	4,4

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E	227	0,9	1460	<3	860	18	<0.7	<0,1
F	133	2,5	3640	<3	210	68	<0.7	<0,1
G	297	3,4	2730	<3	697	7,1	<0.7	<0,1
H	333	3,7	2880	<3	371	3,3	<0.7	<0,1
J	518	4,7	13520	5	438	5,3	<0.7	<0,1
K	46	2,3	2750	<3	477	18	<0.7	<0,1
L	526	<0.9	4630	<2	204	0,3	<0.7	6,8
M	263	<0.9	4730	<2	93	0,4	0,9	7,6
N	2070	37,9	2040	<3	168	2,2	12	26
O	1970	16,2	3560	8	55	0,5	1,6	90
Q	256	3,3	5570	2	24	12	1,3	146
R	30	1,7	5710	<2	268	39	1,4	5,2
U	<2	1,0	11370	<2	117	196	1,7	1
V	<2	<1	1470	<2	46	2	0,5	<0,1
W	790	2,0	72100	<2	83	0,5	<0.7	11
X	723	3,2	10780	9	784	7,1	9,4	50
AA	721	1,9	8350	<6	1939	<0.3	0,8	13
AC	561	<0.9	52850	<2	172	7,8	<0.7	862
AD	38	<1	28500	<2	32	2,2	<0,5	284
AE	7	4,3	10520	<2	229	2,2	5,8	5,6
AF	189	6,1	5130	<2	33	7,5	17	14
AG	641	2,4	5690	2	37	1,3	5,2	13
AH	294	<1	5260	<2	40	<0,1	3,6	6,5
AJ	477	80	4570	3	81	1,4	3,5	25

Table 8

Amount of humic acid and fulvic acid in humic substances

Paraugs	TOC, mg/g	W _{FA} , TOC, %	W _{HA} , TOC, %	Paraugs	TOC, mg/g	W _{FA} , TOC, %	W _{HA} , TOC, %
A	152,0	73,0	27,0	S	98,6	67,9	32,1
B	188,2	46,1	53,9	T	43,6	75,6	24,4
C	169,6	77,0	23,0	U	31,1	89,3	10,7
D	105,3	78,9	21,1	V	50,3	95,4	4,6
E	37,4	54,5	45,5	W	31,1	92,9	7,1
F	201,2	41,6	58,4	X	40,9	57,0	43,0
G	213,8	36,0	64,0	Y	69,2	94,9	5,1
H	26,0	36,9	63,1	Z	113,6	58,2	41,8
J	167,5	41,8	58,2	AA	57,1	69,6	30,4
K	132,4	50,4	49,6	AB	108,5	58,8	41,2
L	136,4	83,1	16,9	AC	63,7	60,2	39,8
M	125,8	43,5	56,5	AD	34,0	79,1	20,9
N	118,3	22,7	77,3	AE	44,3	34,5	65,5
O	146,4	44,6	55,4	AF	27,7	24,8	75,2
P	108,0	81,8	18,2	AG	45,9	10,9	89,1
R	119,2	31,5	68,5	AH	55,1	7,4	92,6
Q	120,8	32,7	67,3	AJ	46,9	7,9	92,1

Table 6Absorption ratios of humic substances in UV-Vis spectra and $\Delta\log K$

Paraugs	E2/E3	E4/E6	E270/400	E280/664	logK
A	2,36	6,80	2,88	34,04	0,81
B	2,21	7,50	2,79	31,78	0,59
C	2,21	7,51	2,79	31,82	0,59
D	2,07	5,57	2,57	20,84	0,52
E	2,40	11,27	3,13	64,45	0,69
F	2,17	8,93	2,73	36,02	0,55
G	2,03	11,03	2,52	43,34	0,55
H	2,88	13,15	3,57	88,12	0,68
J	2,14	12,83	2,70	55,41	0,51
K	2,02	7,36	2,56	30,23	0,61
L	2,05	7,99	2,54	31,66	0,54
M	2,16	16,35	2,65	65,89	0,48
O	2,00	3,64	2,40	13,05	0,56
P	2,40	6,55	2,83	36,88	0,87
Q	2,32	5,29	2,79	24,36	0,74
R	2,16	4,93	2,57	21,03	0,70
N	2,78	6,82	3,00	43,45	0,90
AC	3,19	5,11	4,52	46,69	0,78
AD	3,01	5,08	4,17	41,05	0,79
AE	2,90	6,30	3,82	46,27	0,91
AF	2,68	4,94	3,39	32,71	0,81
AG	2,49	6,54	3,13	42,60	0,92
AH	2,50	6,31	3,16	40,20	0,88
AJ	2,39	5,00	3,09	27,93	0,77

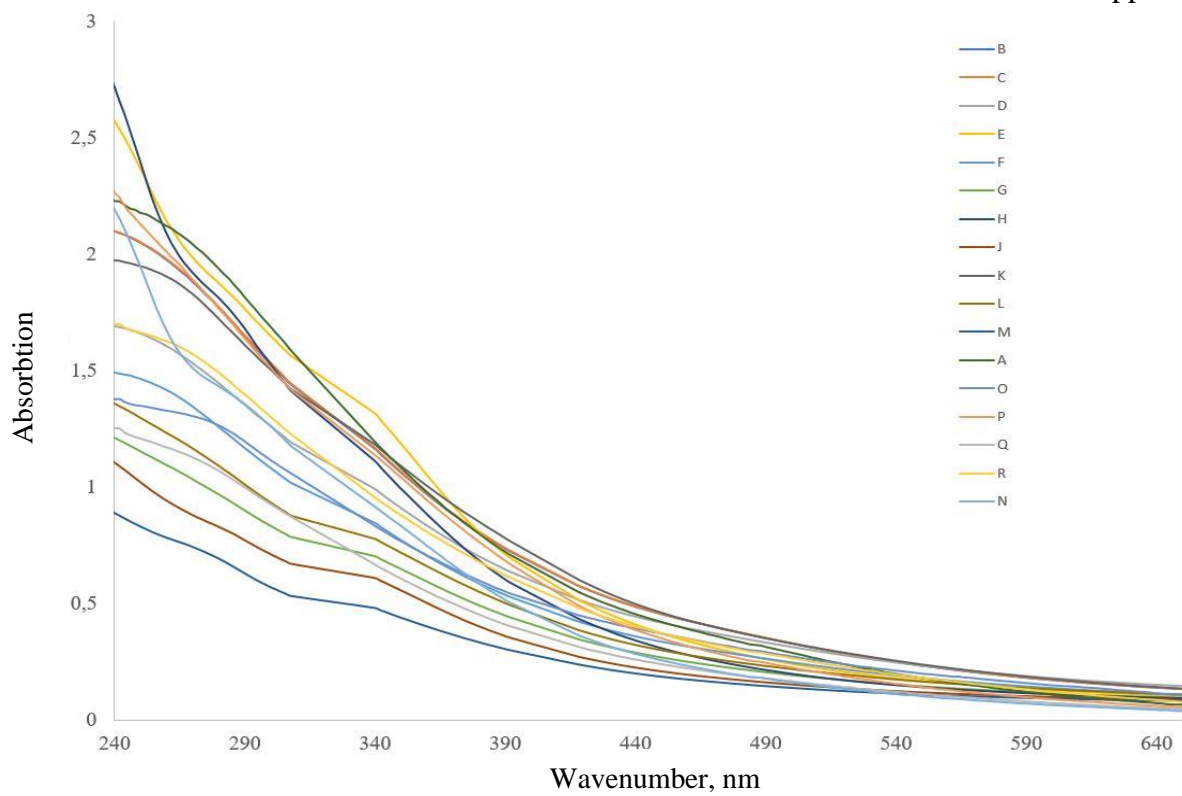


Fig. 6. UV-Vis spektra of humic substances

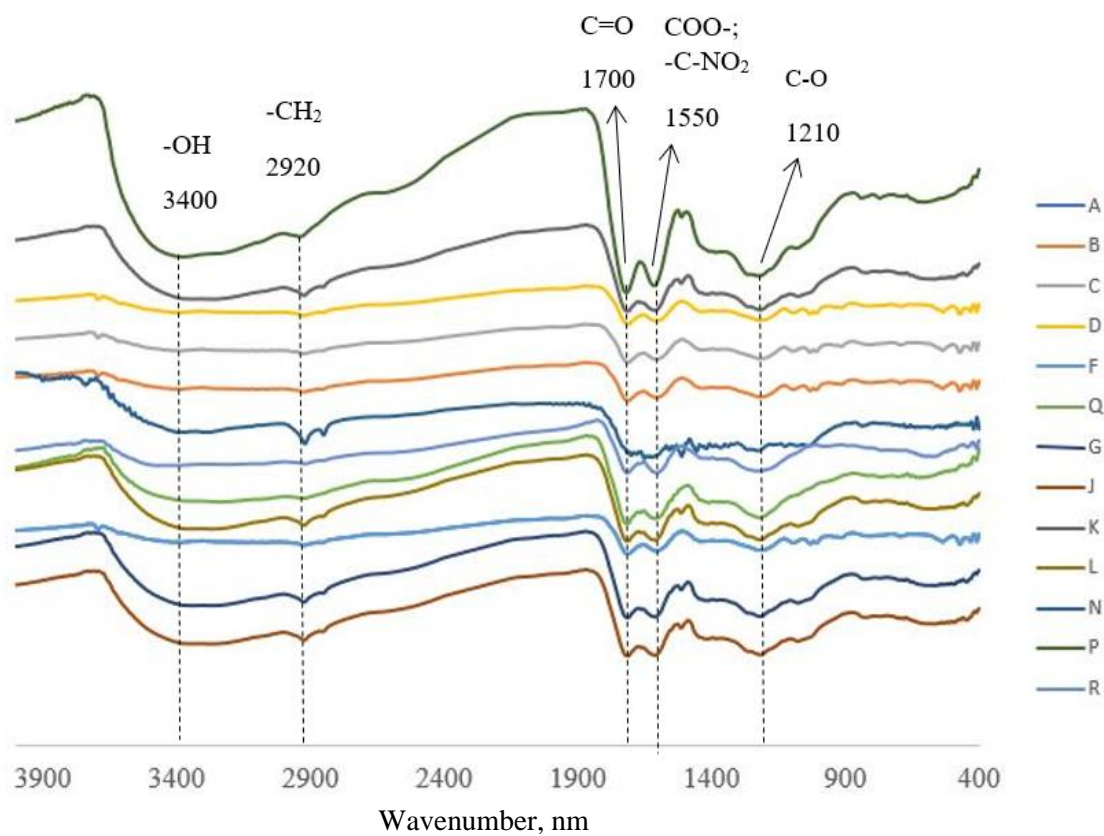


Fig. 7. Fourier transform infrared spectra of humic substances

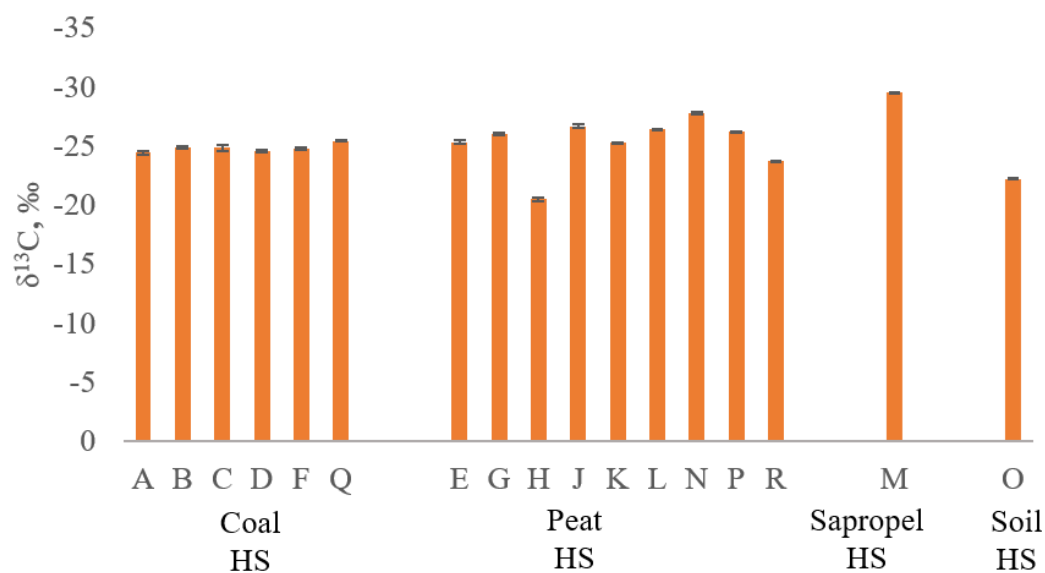


Fig. 8. $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ isotopic ratios of humic substances samples

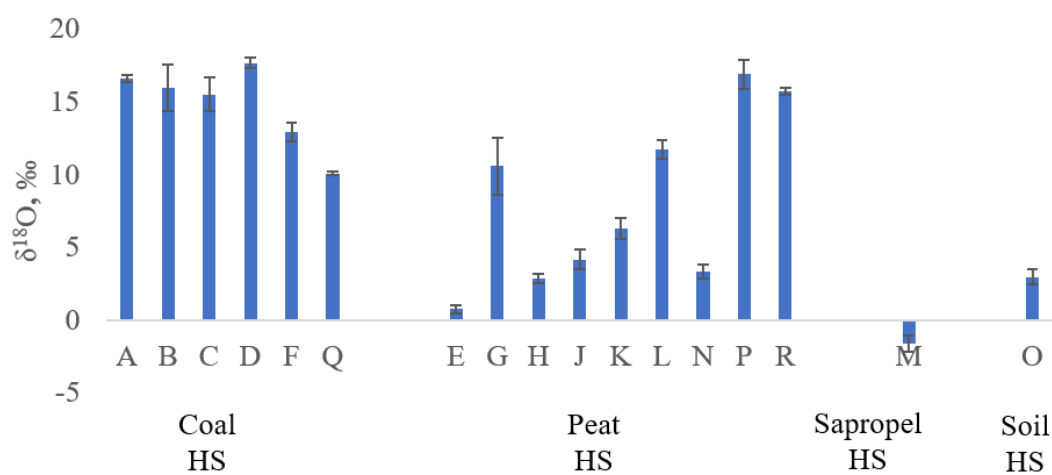


Fig. 9. $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ isotopic ratios of humic substances samples