

## Note: Production of silver nanoclusters using a Matrix-Assembly Cluster Source with a solid CO<sub>2</sub> matrix

Oiko, Vitor; Mathieu, Thibaut; Cao, Lu; Liu, Jian; Palmer, Richard

DOI:  
[10.1063/1.4966213](https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4966213)

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Oiko, V, Mathieu, T, Cao, L, Liu, J & Palmer, R 2016, 'Note: Production of silver nanoclusters using a Matrix-Assembly Cluster Source with a solid CO<sub>2</sub> matrix', *Journal of Chemical Physics*, vol. 145, no. 16, 166101.  
<https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4966213>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

# **Note: Production of silver nanoclusters using a Matrix-Assembly Cluster Source with a solid CO<sub>2</sub> matrix**

V. T. A. Oiko, T. Mathieu, L. Cao, J. Liu, and R. E. Palmer\*

*Nanoscale Physics Research Laboratory,*

*School of Physics & Astronomy, University of Birmingham.*

*Edgbaston, Birmingham, United Kingdom, B15 2TT.*

(Dated: October 13, 2016)

## **Abstract**

One of the main limitations to the application of clusters on applied areas is the limited production, therefore it is of great interest to up scale cluster production while keeping good size control. The Matrix-Assembly Cluster Source (MACS) is a new high flux cluster source, which exploits cluster formation inside a solid rare gas matrix that is sputtered by an ion beam. Clusters are formed and ejected in this process. Here we report the production of Ag clusters when the rare gas is replaced by CO<sub>2</sub> for the matrix formation at 20 K. Size distributions were determined from STEM analysis of samples with four different metal loadings, 4%, 8%, 14% and 23% of Ag atoms to CO<sub>2</sub> molecules, and two ion beam energies, 1 keV and 2 keV. Cluster mean size showed weak dependence on metal loading, being  $\approx 80$  atoms for the first three concentrations, whereas the change in ion beam energy has caused cluster mean size to shift from 86 to 160 atoms. The results are interpreted in terms of bonding energy between Ag and CO<sub>2</sub> and compared to the rare gas (Ar) matrix.

---

\* r.e.palmer@bham.ac.uk

The production of nanocluster beam has been a subject of intense research since the first cluster beam sources were reported in the 1950s. Clusters of virtually any material have been produced with size control that goes down to a single atom[1]. The high control levels have compromised the number of clusters produced, which is one of the main obstacles to exploring cluster properties in applied areas. Recent developments however, have allowed a cluster current of the order of a few nA and deposition rates of nm/s[1–5].

A new type of high flux cluster source is the Matrix-Assembly Cluster Source (MACS)[6, 7]. MACS exploits cluster formation inside a solid rare gas matrix[8–10] and has great potential for scaling up cluster production by orders of magnitude. The matrix is a copper square of side 2.5 mm cooled down to a cryogenic temperature of around 20 K, using a closed cycle cryocooler (SHI, CH-202 10K). Atoms of the material of interest are evaporated from a thermal effusion cell (Createc, HTC-63-10-2000) and co-condensed with gas atoms/molecules forming a solid film that is later sputtered by an ion beam (Tectra, Gen2 plasma source).

The matrix serves as a cooling medium for cluster formation while the ion beam sputtering accomplishes two distinct goals, *(i)* it provides the required energy for the atoms to collide inside the matrix and agglomerate into clusters and *(ii)* it ejects the clusters formed, allowing them to be deposited on a substrate. Changing the metal loading in the matrix tunes the cluster size, which can range from hundreds to thousands of atoms for metal loadings of  $\sim 1\%$  to  $5\%$  in the case of Ag in Ar[7]. The produced clusters are deposited on to transmission electron microscopy (TEM) grids positioned approximately 5 cm away from the matrix. The matrix is angled at  $45^\circ$  to the ion beam and deposition stage, as illustrated in Figure 1.

One practical limitation to the further scaling up of the MACS approach to industrial levels is the temperature required to condense the gas matrix,  $<20$  K for solid Ar. Here we report the replacement of the argon used to date with  $\text{CO}_2$ , which would allow condensation at 80 K so that liquid nitrogen can be used as cooling agent instead of liquid helium.

The clusters produced were analysed via high-angular annular dark field (HAADF) images in an aberration-corrected scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM); the JEM-2100F (Jeol) was operated at 200 kV. Figure 2 shows STEM images and the corresponding size distributions for a range of metal loadings and ion beam energies. These samples correspond to silver clusters produced from a  $\text{CO}_2$  matrix that was built for 5 minutes at a pressure of  $8.0 \times 10^{-6}$  Torr. Particle size distributions obtained in reference to the intensities of size-selected gold clusters show that one can correlate the number of atoms inside a cluster

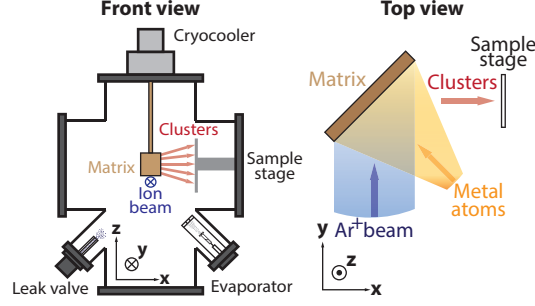


FIG. 1. Schematic illustration of the Matrix-Assembly Cluster Source showing the key components and geometry.

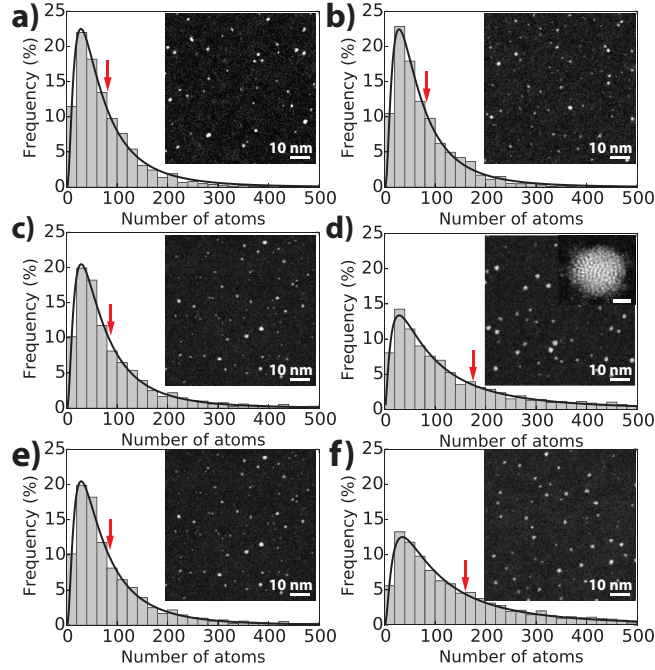


FIG. 2. Size distribution and HAADF-STEM images of the samples prepared from  $\text{CO}_2$  matrices with different Ag loadings, (a) 4%, (b) 8%, (c) 14% and (d) 23% and ion beam energies, (e) 1 keV and (f) 2 keV. A lognormal distribution fit (solid line) is shown with the average cluster size indicated by an arrow. High-resolution image of a single cluster is seen on the inset, scale bar corresponds to 1 nm.

with the integrated HAADF intensity[11]. To determine the size distribution of the samples in the present work, we used the HAADF intensities of single Ag atoms as the reference. Single atom intensities were acquired from high-resolution images; due to beam damage it is common to find some of them in the vicinity of a particle. A set of atoms is measured,

a Gaussian is fitted to the intensity distribution and the average used as the single atom intensity.

For figures 2a-2d the temperature of the evaporator was changed to alter the deposition rate and thus the metal loading in the matrix. Four different deposition rates, 0.2 Å/s, 0.3 Å/s, 0.5 Å/s and 0.9 Å/s corresponding to a matrix loading of 4%, 8%, 14% and 23% (number of silver atoms compared with CO<sub>2</sub> molecules). The matrix was sputtered by an ion beam of 1 kV and with  $\sim 50 \mu\text{A}$  for 2 minute intervals, during which the clusters formed were deposited on the TEM grids. The histograms present asymmetrical peaks characteristic of lognormal distributions, which were fitted to the graphs (solid line) in Figure 2. The mean sizes of the clusters in ascending order of metal loading are 79, 83, 86 and 175 atoms. The peaks of the distributions are at 25, 27, 25 and 28 atoms, values extracted from the fit.

The size distributions are not very sensitive to the metal loading in the matrix. For metal loadings of 4% to 14% the size distributions are largely similar, with a mean cluster size of approximately 80 silver atoms, for higher concentrations in the matrix cluster size of 175 Ag atoms is obtained. This behaviour is different from the previous work when an argon matrix was used[7, 10, 12]. A possible reason for the difference in the size distributions relates to the diffusion of Ag atoms during matrix formation. The bonding energy of Ag in Ar is  $\approx 0.2$  eV[13], whereas for Ag in CO<sub>2</sub> is on the order of 1 eV[14]. It seems that silver atoms may diffuse more easily in an Ar matrix than in CO<sub>2</sub>, thus making the initial cluster size (before sputtering) more dependent of loading conditions.

Figures 2e and 2f show the cluster production for a matrix with 14% of Ag and two different ion beam energies, 1 keV and 2 keV. We see the formation of bigger clusters, leading to broadening of the lognormal distribution for the higher beam energy. Average cluster size nearly doubles from 86 to 160 Ag atoms and the peak position shifts from 25 to 33 atoms. An average cluster current of  $0.15 \pm 0.02$  nA was obtained, which smaller than the values reported for an Ar matrix[6, 7].

In this short article we demonstrated that Ag clusters with up to a few hundred atoms have been generated from a condensed CO<sub>2</sub> matrix. Although the experiments were conducted at a temperature of 20 K, the use of CO<sub>2</sub> means MACS operation should be viable at higher (liquid nitrogen) temperatures. Cluster size seems to depend less on metal loading in the matrix than previous response for an Ar matrix[7] - an effect which may be due to reduced diffusion prior to sputtering - but cluster size is sensitive to ion beam energy.

We are grateful to Shane Murphy for fruitful discussions and to Dawn Foster for the assistance with the STEM. We thank EPSRC, the Leverhulme Trust and Innovate UK (formerly the Technology Strategy Board) for the financial support. The STEM was provided by the Birmingham Science City project funded by AWM and the ERDF. MACS concept is the subject of the following patent applications: Palmer, R. E., (2011) GB Patent Application GB1113168.7 (and patents claiming priority from this patent), published as (2014) WO2013017870.

- 
- [1] C. Binns, *Surface Science Reports* **44**, 1 (2001).
  - [2] A. Majumdar, D. Kpp, M. Ganeva, D. Datta, S. Bhattacharyya, and R. Hippler, *Review of Scientific Instruments* **80**, 095103 (2009), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.3213612>.
  - [3] C. Zhang, H. Tsunoyama, H. Akatsuka, H. Sekiya, T. Nagase, and A. Nakajima, *J. Phys. Chem. A* **117**, 10211 (2013).
  - [4] F. Caruso, A. Bellacicca, and P. Milani, *Applied Physics Letters* **108**, 163501 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4947281>.
  - [5] D. C. Engemann, S. Roese, and H. Hövel, *Journal of Physical Chemistry C* **120**, 6239 (2016).
  - [6] P. R. Ellis, C. M. Brown, P. T. Bishop, J. Yin, K. Cooke, W. D. Terry, J. Liu, F. Yin, and R. E. Palmer, *Faraday Discuss.* **188**, 39 (2016).
  - [7] R. E. Palmer, L. Cao, and F. Yin, *Review of Scientific Instruments* **87**, 046103 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4947229>.
  - [8] R. Monot, C. Narbel, and J.-P. Borel, *Il Nuovo Cimento B* **19**, 253 (1974).
  - [9] M. Rappaz and F. Faes, *Journal of Applied Physics* **46**, 3273 (1975).
  - [10] C. Steinbrüchel and D. Gruen, *Surface Science* **106**, 160 (1981).
  - [11] N. P. Young, Z. Y. Li, Y. Chen, S. Palomba, M. Di Vece, and R. E. Palmer, *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **101**, 246103 (2008).
  - [12] T. Welker and T. P. Martin, *The Journal of Chemical Physics* **70**, 5683 (1979).
  - [13] C. J. Evans, T. G. Wright, and A. M. Gardner, *The Journal of Physical Chemistry A* **114**, 4446 (2010), pMID: 20180527, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1021/jp912027y>.
  - [14] A. W. Czanderna and J. R. Biegen, *Journal of Vacuum Science & Technology* **8**, 594 (1971).