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# Fabrication of tuned nanostructures using Low-Energy Highly Charged Ions

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Slow highly charged ions were utilized recently for the creation of monotype surface nanostructures (craters, calderas or hillocks) in different materials. In the present study, we report on the ability of slow highly charged xenon ions ( $^{129}\text{Xe}^{Q+}$ ) to form three different types of nanostructures on LiF (100) surface. By increasing the charge state from  $Q = 15$  to  $Q = 36$ , the shape of the impact induced nanostructures changes from craters to hillocks crossing an intermediate stage of caldera structures. The dimensional analysis of the nanostructures reveals an increase of the height up to 1.5 nm as a function of the potential energy of the incident ions. Based on the evolution of both the geometry and size of the created nanostructures, defect-mediated desorption and the development of a thermal spike are utilized as creation mechanisms of the nanostructures at low and high charge states, respectively.

In recent years, ion beam technology has demonstrated its uniqueness and effectiveness in the synthesis and precise control of nanostructures in various materials [1–3]. Both swift heavy ions (SHI) and slow highly charged ions (HCI) are especially efficient in creating nanostructures via single ion impacts, i.e. each ion creates one nanostructure. However, HCI have the significant advantage over SHI that the nanostructures are created only at the surface without modifying the bulk of the material [4]. Depending on their structure and properties the materials respond differently to the energy deposition by HCI, resulting in different types of nanostructures. In case of  $\text{CaF}_2$ ,  $\text{BaF}_2$ , Muscovite mica,  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{SrTiO}_3$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and HOPG nanohillocks were observed [5–12], whereas craters (pits) were created in Si, PMMA, KBr, KCl and carbon nanomembranes [13–15]. Furthermore, caldera structures were formed in  $\text{TiO}_2(110)$  [16]. In addition, pyramidal pits were created in the surfaces of  $\text{CaF}_2$  and  $\text{BaF}_2$  by means of selective chemical etching [5, 6]. For each material investigated so far only one type of nanostructures induced by single HCI impacts has been observed [4].

In this letter, we report on the creation of *three different* types of nanostructures in *one* material, namely crystalline lithium fluoride (LiF), after irradiation with HCI of different charge states. LiF has a wide band gap of 14.6 eV and highly stable radiation-induced color centers at RT. These characteristics make LiF a prospective material for many applications such as laser sources, wave guides and dosimetry [17–19]. Moreover, LiF films were grown epitaxially on Si(100) opening the possibility of using LiF as an insulating material in silicon based devices [20]. In view of these applications nanostructuring of LiF by ions has a ~~strong~~ technological relevance.

LiF belongs to the class of ionic fluoride materials (e.g.,  $\text{LaF}_2$ ,  $\text{MgF}_2$ ,  $\text{CaF}_2$  and  $\text{BaF}_2$ ). They were intensively studied after irradiation with SHI [21–24]. The deposi-

tion of the large kinetic energy of SHI causes strong electronic excitation and ionization in a localized zone. As a result, different kinds of modifications were induced in both the surface and bulk of LiF and the other ionic crystals. Among all the investigated fluorides, LiF exhibits the highest efficiency for the creation of color centers and for volume swelling, with a strong dependence on ion fluence and electronic energy loss ( $dE/dx$ ) [21, 25, 26].

The interaction of SHI with the fluoride ionic single crystals is accompanied by the creation of surface hillocks provided that a threshold in ( $dE/dx$ ) of  $\sim 5.0$  keV/nm. The size of these hillocks was observed to increase as a function of ( $dE/dx$ ) [27–29]. Several recent experiments using HCI showed the formation of similar nanostructures. This similarity suggests a common mechanism regarding the transfer of the electronic excitations to the lattice of the irradiated material [4]. The deposition of the potential energy  $E_p$  of HCI, i.e. the sum of the binding energy of all missing electrons, plays the same role as  $dE/dx$  of SHI for the creation of surface nanostructures.

The samples for the present study are thin platelets of  $1.0\text{ cm}^2$  area and  $\sim 0.5\text{ mm}$  thickness, mechanically cleaved in ambient atmosphere along the (100) plane from  $1.0 \times 1.0 \times 5\text{ cm}^3$  LiF single-crystal block (Korth Kristalle, Germany). The freshly cleaved samples were irradiated at normal incidence with highly charged  $^{129}\text{Xe}^{Q+}$  ions of different charge states in the range of  $Q = 15$  to  $Q = 36$  corresponding to a wide range of potential energies between  $E_p = 2.2\text{ keV}$  and  $E_p = 27.8\text{ keV}$ . The ions were extracted from the electron beam ion trap (EBIT) of the two-source-facility at the Ion Beam Center of the Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf. After charge state separation by means of a  $90^\circ$  analyzing magnet, the ions were decelerated by a two-stage deceleration system to the desired kinetic energy of 100 keV (750 eV/amu). Utilizing ion beam diameter of 1.5 mm, an area of  $7 \times 7\text{ mm}^2$  was homogeneously

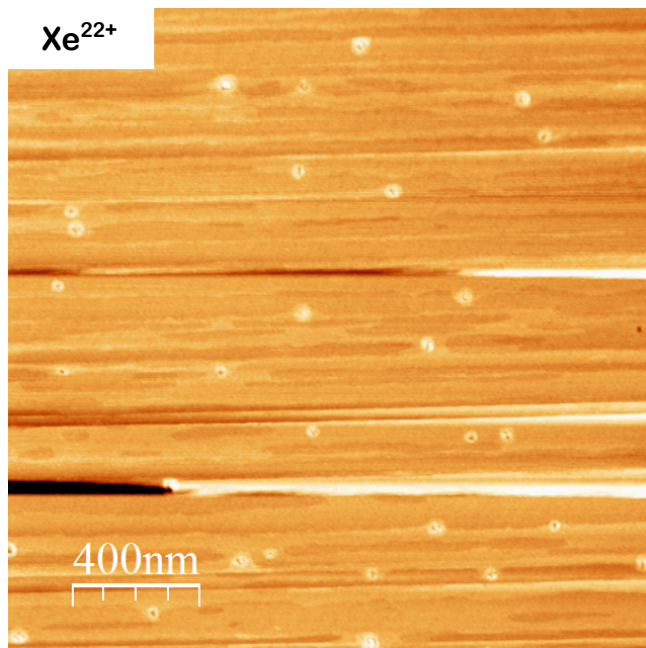


FIG. 1. SFM topographic images of LiF surfaces irradiated with 750 eV/amu  $\text{Xe}^{22+}$ .

irradiated by wobbling the sample holder. The ion fluence on the samples was in the range of  $7 \times 10^8$  and  $2 \times 10^9$  ions/cm<sup>2</sup>. After irradiation, the surfaces were analyzed using a Nanoscope III (Bruker) scanning force microscope (SFM) operated in tapping mode under ambient conditions.

Depending on the charge state of the  $\text{Xe}^{Q+}$  ions and thereby on the potential energy three different types of nanostructures have been observed on the irradiated LiF surfaces. In all cases, the areal density of the features coincide well with the applied ion fluence as shown exemplarily in Fig. 1 for caldera structures created by  $\text{Xe}^{22+}$  ions. Thus every single ion impact results in the formation of a nanostructure. For low charge states of  $Q = 15$  and  $Q = 18$  the structures are pits as shown in Fig. 2a. Pit structures have already been observed on KBr and KCl surfaces after irradiations with charge states larger than 15 and 25, respectively [13, 30]. On KBr the pits were only one monolayer deep. Here, the pits exhibit a mean depth of  $\sim 0.6$  nm corresponding to about two atomic layers. The average lateral size of the pits increases from  $\sim 20$  nm for  $Q = 15$  to  $\sim 25$  nm for  $Q = 18$ . The potential sputtering yield for such pits is around 11000 atom/ion and 18000 atom/ion, respectively. Increasing the charge state to  $Q = 22$  the shape of the created structures changes. The pits are now surrounded by a rim protruding out of the surface as shown in Fig. 2b. The rim height also depends on the potential energy and increases from 0.6 nm for  $Q = 22$  to 1.4 nm for  $Q = 30$ . Similar caldera structures have been observed earlier on  $\text{TiO}_2$  [16]. For even higher charge states of

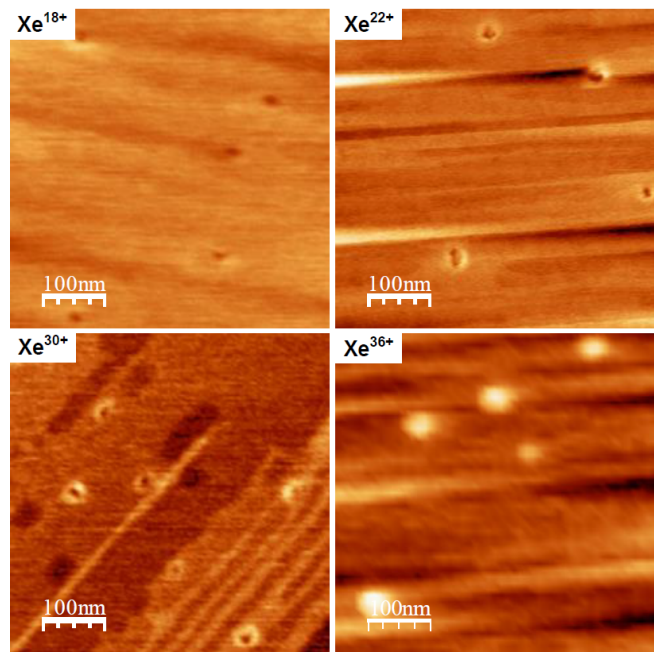


FIG. 2. (color online). (a) Pit, (b) and (c) caldera, and (d) hillock surface nanostructures created by  $\text{Xe}^{Q+}$  ( $Q = 18, 22, 30$  and  $36$ ) ions in LiF single crystals.

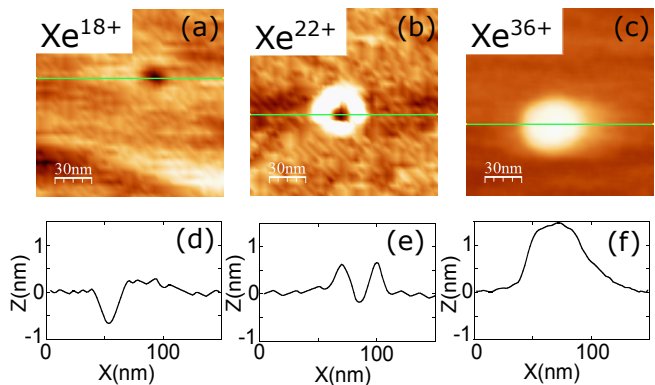


FIG. 3. (color online). SFM topographic image (up) and line profile (down) of one pit, caldera structure and hillock induced by  $\text{Xe}^{18+}$ ,  $\text{Xe}^{22+}$  and  $\text{Xe}^{36+}$ , respectively.

$Q = 33$  and  $Q = 36$  the shape of the structures changes now to hillocks with an average height of 1.0 nm and 1.5 nm, respectively. This kind of structures have been investigated in detail on HCI irradiated  $\text{CaF}_2$  surfaces [31].

A common feature for HCI induced nanostructures is the presence of a threshold in the potential energy which has to be exceeded in order to observe the created features [4]. It is obvious from the obtained results for LiF that two potential energy thresholds exist, one for the creation of the caldera-like structures and the other for hillocks. In case of calderas, the threshold is between 3.4 keV and 5.8 keV, whereas for the creation of hillocks

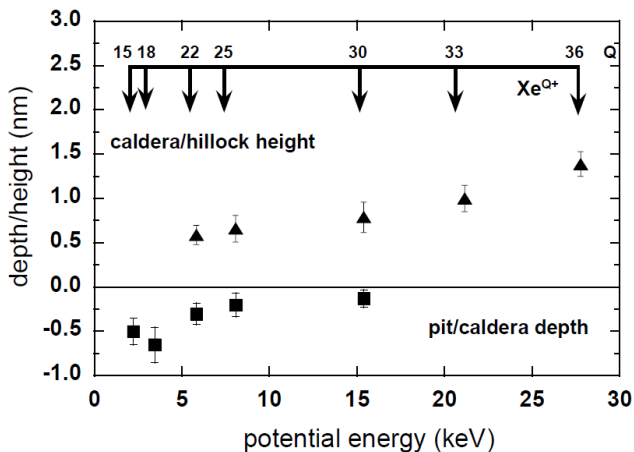


FIG. 4. (color online). Mean rim height (positive) and depth (negative) of nanostructures created in LiF(100) surface by 750 eV/amu  $\text{Xe}^{Q+}$  as a function of the potential energy. The ion charge states (Q) of the ions are shown in the upper horizontal scale.

is between 15.4 keV and 21.2 keV. In order to visualize the evolution of the nanostructures the rim height/pit depth was selected as a common parameter, which is studied as a function of the potential energy (see Fig. 4). Typical SFM images and line profiles used for the rim height/pit depth estimation for each shape of the created nanostructures are shown in Fig. 3. The rim height of the structures increases nonlinearly from 0 to 1.5 nm by increasing the potential energy from  $E_p = 3.4$  keV to  $E_p = 27.8$  keV. In opposite to rim, the depth decreases until it vanishes around the potential energy threshold for hillocks creation.

Based on the observed change of both the shape and size of the created nanostructures as a function of potential energy, a combination of non-thermal and thermal effects were suggested. The transition between these regimes are correlated with surpassing critical potential energy needed for melting a crystalline LiF region. In order to describe and analyze the effect of the ion potential energy  $E_p$  in the creation of the observed nanostructures, we adopted the inelastic thermal spike model for insulators, originally used for swift heavy ions [32]. Within the modified model, the dissipation of potential energy is performed in two steps: first, the potential energy of the projectile is deposited on a femtosecond time scale into the electronic subsystem. In a second step, the energy is transferred to the lattice atoms on a picoseconds scale, where they are heated up causing strong lattice deformations. The small volume, where the potential energy of HCI is deposited leads to a high energy density, which can be sufficient to induce phase transformation in the impact region. For this low-velocity projectiles, the heat propagation can be considered in a hemispherical volume, assuming the crystal surface as a reflecting

boundary [33], when the heat conduction equation for the lattice reads:

$$\rho C \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = \frac{1}{r^2} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left( r^2 K \frac{\partial T}{\partial r} \right) + N \quad (1)$$

where  $T(r, t)$  is the temperature distribution to be found,  $C(T)$  is the heat capacity and  $K(T)$  is the thermal conductivity. The two-temperature thermal spike model consider the electronic thermal conduction and the heat transfer to the lattice via the term  $N(r, t)$ . This heat source term was employed in a simple analytical form for the characterization of the lattice molten volume [32, 33]:

$$N(r, t) = \frac{2E_p}{(4\pi\sigma)^{3/2} \tau} \exp\left(-\frac{t}{\tau} - \frac{r^2}{4\sigma^2}\right) \quad (2)$$

Here the factor of 2 reflects the hemisphere geometry and

$$\sigma^2 = D_e t + r_0^2$$

where electron diffusivity  $D_e = 1.0 \text{ cm}^2/\text{s}$  and the electron-lattice relaxation time  $\tau = 8 \times 10^{-14} \text{ s}$  [34]. The initial radius of the free electron distribution is  $r_0 = 1.0 \text{ nm}$  [32].  $\sigma(\tau)$  determines the region of lattice heating taking into account that similar parameters for SHI are utilized [32–34]. This is mainly based on the similarity between HCI and SHI in the energy deposition to the solid surface, which was demonstrated by observing similar structures in different materials [9, 28]. Despite the fact that part of the ion potential energy can be lost due to electron emission, we omit this effect as the retention part in the case of insulators is close to the full  $E_p$  [35].

Numerical solution of Eq.(1) is plotted in Fig. 5. When  $T(r, t)$  reaches the melting temperature of  $T_m = 1118 \text{ K}$ , the melting starts keeping the temperature constant until the latent heat of fusion is absorbed. During cooling down the solidification similarly proceeds at  $T_m$ , forming plateau on the  $T(r, t)$ , as shown in Fig. 5. The maximal value of the outer radius of the partially molten region, where the melting is at least started, is used to calculate the enclosed hemispherical volume (Fig. 6, dashed line). The similarly calculated volume of the completely molten zone ( $T > T_m$ ) is narrower (solid line) due to the latent heat, (see Fig. 6). The calculations showed that the melting occurs at potential energy of about 6.0 keV, which is in fair agreement with the observed threshold of caldera formation. However, the volume of the protruded structures, which is estimated from the AFM profiles, is larger than the calculated volumes. This fact is in agreement with previous results for  $\text{CaF}_2$  [5, 31], which indicates that the induced melting triggers the appearance of the caldera/hillocks, but their size is rather determined by thermal expansion, which provides the outward viscous

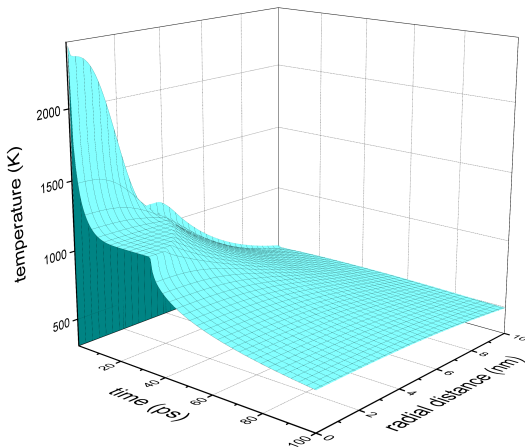


FIG. 5. (color online). Lattice temperature ( $T$ ) as a function of time ( $t$ ) and distance ( $r$ ) from the ion impact site of HCl of  $E_p = 20$  keV.

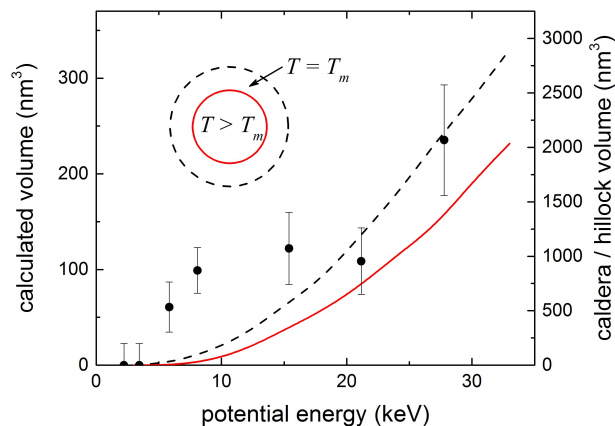


FIG. 6. (color online). The calculated volumes of the impact regions, where the melting starts (dashed line) and completed (solid line), and the caldera/hillock volume (black dots, right axis) as a function of ion potential energy.

flow or at least high-temperature plastic deformations, followed by rapid quenching.

The rim of the caldera structure results from the outward flow of the molten material followed by rapid quenching. In addition, the further increase of the potential energy leads to a size increase of the molten zone until the crater of the caldera is closed. This transition is represented by the stepwise increase of the height of the caldera and hillock structures in the analyzed results, as shown in Fig. 3. Similarly, the volume of the created structures increases as a function of potential energy, as shown in Fig. 6.

The formation of pits for ions with a potential energies below the threshold required for melting is not expected

in view of thermal spike model. However, for wide band gap materials with strong electron-phonon coupling the strong electronic excitations induced by the potential energy release, i.e. hot holes and electron-hole pairs, can cause lattice defect formation without melting by the creation of self-trapped holes (STH) and self-trapped excitons (STE). STE will decay in LiF into separated Frenkel pairs, namely H-centers ( $F_2^-$  on an anion lattice site) and F-centers (electron localized in a F-vacancy). H-centers are stable in LiF at  $T \leq 60$  K [36]. Above this temperature the H-centers become mobile and can diffuse to the surface leading to the desorption of  $F^0$ . In addition, when F-centers reach the surface, they can recombine with  $Li^+$  leading to the desorption of  $Li^0$ . However, the creation and mobility of both F- and H-centers can be also affected by the presence of the contained impurities. This model, originally developed for electron and photon induced desorption of alkali halides [37], was used successfully to describe the formation of monoatomic deep pits on KBr surfaces induced by highly charged Xe ions [13]. Furthermore, the existence of a threshold for potential sputtering as well as the charge state dependence of the potential sputtering by multiple charged ions gave conclusive evidence for a defect-mediated sputtering mechanisms in LiF [38, 39]. The electron stimulated desorption and sputtering by singly charged ions lead to the emission of only a few atoms per incident electron/ion, which desorb predominantly from weakly bound positions at step edges. For high fluence irradiations with electrons and slow moderately charged ions similar nanostructures were observed [13, 40, 41]. However, these structures are the result of nucleation and coarsening of vacancies and vacancy clusters. For slow highly charged ions the energy deposition in the surface during the neutralization and de-excitation processes is very large leading to a high excitation density and thus to a high density of H- and F-centers in a small area at the surface. Consequently, pit structures are created directly by single ion impacts. The pits in our experiments are caused by the desorption of around 10 LiF molecules per 100 eV potential energy. This value is about one order of magnitude higher than the value reported in Ref. [38, 42] for desorption induced by multicharged ions.

In conclusion, we have shown that even in the same material slow highly charged ions can be used to create different types of nanostructures. This was demonstrated by observing three types of nanostructures, i.e. pit, caldera and hillock structures in the (100) surface of LiF after irradiation with slow highly charged  $Xe^{Q+}$  ions. The shape and size of the created nanostructures were controlled by tuning the potential energy of the incident ions: pits for charge  $Q = 15..18$ , calderas for  $Q = 22..30$  and hillocks for  $Q = 33..36$ . The height of the nanostructures increases by varying the potential energy from 3.4 keV to 27.8 keV. Probing the lattice heating following the HCl impact by the numerical calculations of the modi-

fied inelastic thermal spike model shows that for the rim formation lattice temperature should exceed the melting point. The formation of pits was in turn explained by defect-mediated desorption due to the high defect density induced by the potential energy deposition in a small volume.

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