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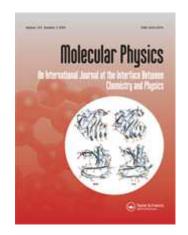
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Molecular dynamics study of roughness and stress evolution using

a Lennard–Jones potential

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A three-dimensional molecular dynamics simulation (MD) is proposed to study the film growth, roughness and stress evolution during atoms deposition on the (100) plane of a fcc regular crystal. We use cubic system with x-y periodic boundary condition. At the bottom we have an atomic surface and at the top a reflecting wall. The model uses the Lennard-Jones potential to describe the interatomic forces. The simulation results show that the film grows with the Volmer-Weber mode and exhibits specific curve shape of the stress evolution. The mean biaxial stress obtained during the simulation attains a local tension maximum at a coverage of two monolayers. The stress in normal direction is smaller than the biaxial stress. The main contribution to the stress in the film arises from the first monolayer. The curves describing roughness possess maximum values at the same substrate coverage. The dependence of the roughness on the temperature is examined.

Keywords: film growth; stress; roughness; molecular dynamics simulation

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1 Introduction

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Stresses are usually generated during the process of thin films deposition independently of the deposition technique applied and one can influence the reliability of evaluation of the deposited system properties by applying appropriate techniques. In some case, system properties of strained films can be improved. In other, stresses can lead to defective functioning, or even to breakdowns of the most technologically important thin-film elements. Therefore, recognition of phenomena that are mainly responsible for stress in thin films is of much significance. Numerical simulations are very useful for the study of the behaviour of thin films at a microscopic level. It is more convenient and cheaper to examine wide ranges of parameter space and to optimize deposition conditions, such as deposition rate, substrate temperature, etc., using computer simulation rather than a protracted experimental search.

Recently, several authors proposed MD simulation and kinetic Monte Carlo simulation [1-7] to understand changes of the structure in growing films and their final properties. In particular, Paik *et al.* [1] used MD simulation to study the growth process on various orientations of a fcc substrate using Lennard–Jones potential. Their results showed that the best epitaxial film growth with the lowest numbers of lattice defects takes place along [100] and [111] directions. Guan *et al.* [2] found several parameters, which affect the type of the film growth. The deposition of Ag on Cu (100) at a high temperature causes the hexagonal close–packed structure to disappear at a low coverage.

Many of the above quoted publications concentrated on the modelling the real systems. The results of MD simulation of films of Co on Cu (001) [4] and Ni on Cu (001) [5] showed that these films exhibit a pseudomorphic growth. Moreover, it was also demonstrated that numerous parameters can affect the properties of

The papers cited above were focused on study of influence of the simulation parameters on the morphology of growing films. Dong *et al.* [8] investigated the dependence of the crystal lattice defects on the stress relaxation process, but only for two-dimensional system. Several authors employed molecular dynamics simulation to understand behaviour of stress in films [9, 10]. In particular, Zhang *et al.* [9] used this technique to study the stress generation mechanism in thin film grown by ion-beam deposition, whereas Kalyanasundaram *et al.* [10] presented results of stress evolution during ion bombardment in silicon.

There have been reported experiments of thin film deposition that show growth by Frank van der Merwe, Stranski-Krastanov, and Volmer-Weber mode. In the Frank van der Merwe growth mode a crystal layer tends to be completed before a new layer is started above and this mode is also called layer by layer growth. In an opposite situation, i.e. in the Volmer-Weber growth mode the second overlayer growth begins before the first monolayer is completed, producing a three-dimensional islands. The Stranski-Krastanov case is an intermediate between the Frank van der Merwe and the Volmer-Weber mode. The deposition process near equilibrium state leads to layer by layer growth mode. Usually, experimental measurements show three-dimensional growth. It should be stressed, however, that the application of the Lennard-Jones potential in simulations always leads to the Volmer-Weber growth mode [2].

In order to investigate the substrate influence on deposited layers that are built of atoms of the same kind we performed a series MD simulations. The stress evolution 13:20

Molecular Physics

during the film growth is directly connected with the structure changes of the film. The aim of our simulations was not to reproduce the behaviour of a particular material, but rather to gain the knowledge about the film growth mechanism on the atomic level and to predict the film properties. To do that we carried out a three-dimensional molecular dynamics simulation of a thin film deposition onto initially flat surface. In our simulations we have assumed that the atoms interact via simple Lennard–Jones potential. This type of interatomic potential provides a reasonable basis for modelling solids. First, we study the growth mode and morphology of obtained thin films. Then, we examine the stress evolution in film during deposition. A comparison of the present simulation results with those obtained using more refined potentials would be very instructive and will be the subject of future studies.

2 Simulation model

The algorithm of three-dimensional MD simulations used in this work was described by Allen and Tildesley [11]. Specifically, the trajectories of each atom were obtained by integrating Newton's equation of motion and the integration was performed in a step-wise manner over finite time steps by using a fifth-order predictor-corrector method. The interaction between atoms was assumed to be pairwise additive and the pair potential was represented by a truncated (12,6) Lennard Jones (LJ) potential

$$U(r) = \begin{cases} 4\varepsilon [(\sigma/r)^{12} - (\sigma/r)^6] \ r \le r_{max} \\ 0 & r > r_{max} \end{cases},$$
(1)

where σ is the distance between the particles for which the potential is equal to 0, ε is the strength of the interaction, and r_{max} is the cut-off distance, that is assumed to be 3.5σ .

The simulations were carried out in a rectangular box of the dimensions $L_x \times L_y \times L_z$ and periodic boundary conditions were applied in the x and y directions. At the bottom of the box an unmovable solid wall was placed as a substrate. This wall was assumed to be the (100) plane of a fcc regular crystal characterized by the unit vectors a_1 and a_2 of the same length $|a_1| = |a_2| = a$. Throughout the paper all the distances are expressed in units of a, and the energy parameter of the potential (1), ε is the unit of energy. To prevent the atoms from leaving the simulation box, a reflecting wall was set at its top.

The source that creates particles in the system was located at a sufficient distance away from the bottom surface. This distance was equal to 45 in our case. The particles were created at random (x, y) positions and initially lunched perpendicular to the bottom surface.

The simulations were carried out for $L_x = L_y$ equal to 16, 20, 25, 30 and for $L_z = 50$. The substrate crystals are formed by 15 atomic layers, i.e. for $L_x = L_y = 16 \times 16$ the crystal contains 3840 atoms. We can distinguish two regions in the simulated system. The region of a high concentration atoms (near the bottom surface) corresponds to a solid film. However, the region with a low atomic concentration corresponds to a vapour. The simulation was divided into two stages: deposition and equilibration. The deposition process consist in repeating sequence of creating a single atom, and equilibrating at a selected temperature. Finally, the obtained system was equilibrated.

The interaction of a fluid atom with the surface was calculated by summing up the LJ potentials

$$U_{gs}(r) = \begin{cases} 4\varepsilon_{gs} [(\sigma_{gs}/r)^{12} - (\sigma_{gs}/r)^6] \ r \le r_{gs,max} \\ 0 & r > r_{gs,max} \end{cases},$$
(2)

over all the atoms of the wall. The cut-off distance, $r_{gs,max}$ was again equal to

3.5 σ_{gs} . We assumed that the size of the atoms is equal to $\sigma^* = \sigma_{gs}^* = 1.0$, and that $\varepsilon_{gs}^* = \varepsilon^* = 1.0$.

The reduced time was defined as usual [11], $t_0 = (m\sigma^2/\varepsilon)^{1/2}$, where *m* is the mass of the atom. The time step used to solve Newton's equations of motion was $\Delta t = 0.005t_0$. Hereafter the time is expressed as a number of the time steps. The temperature during the simulation was kept constant by periodical velocity rescaling. The method of simple velocity rescaling allows to keep the average temperature at required level. In our algorithm of simulation we rescaling velocity every 5-10 time steps. The observables of interest are dependent on the averages and this algorithm can be safely used [12]. The reduced temperature is defined as $T^* = k_B T/\varepsilon$, where k_B is the Boltzmann constant and T is the temperature of deposited atoms per number of time steps. The lower value of this ratio corresponds to the lower value of real deposited rate. The energy of deposition was always equal to $E_k \approx 18eV$. This value corresponds to kinetic energy of a Cu atoms. One of the most suitable experimental methods for this purpose is physical vapour deposition.

Usually, the stress definition that considers the stress as the force acting on the face area is not suitable for atomic systems. For such systems the stress is determined by position of atoms resulting from interatomic potential. One of commonly used definition of the stress for atomic system is the virial stress, which is results from a generalization of the virial theorem of Clausius [13] for the gas pressure. According to this definition, the average stress tensor (S) over an effective volume is a sum of the contribution from all the atoms in the domain of the volume V.

$$S = \frac{1}{V} \sum_{i}^{N} \left(m_i v_i \otimes v_i + \frac{1}{2} \sum_{j \neq i} r_{ij} \otimes f_{ij} \right), \tag{3}$$

where m_i is the mass, v_i is the velocity of the atom i, $r_{ij} = r_i - r_j$ is the spatial vector between atoms i and j, N is the total number atoms in the domain, and \otimes denotes the tensor product of two vectors. The interatomic force f_{ij} applied on the particle i by the particle j is

$$f_{ij} = \frac{\partial U(r_{ij})}{\partial r_{ij}},\tag{4}$$

The sign convention adopted here for the force such that it is positive for attraction and negative for repulsion. Accordingly, a positive stress indicates expansion, whereas a negative stress indicates compression.

The stress definition includes two parts. The first part stems from the kinetic energy of the atoms, while the second part comes from interatomic forces. For solids, the kinetic energy term is usually small compared to the interatomic force term and is ignored. The stress is a (3×3) tensor, which can be represented in the diagonal form:

$$\overline{S} \equiv \begin{pmatrix} S_{xx} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & S_{yy} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & S_{zz} \end{pmatrix},$$
(5)

where S_{xx} , S_{yy} and S_{zz} are stresses in the x, y and z directions. The film stress is calculated when the system was equilibrated after each atom deposition.

The atoms are randomly deposited on the growing surface and each deposition increases the film thickness. To determine the roughness of the growing surface we calculated the interfacial width W(t) from the simulation data. The width is defined as:

$$W(t) = \left[< h^2(t) > - < h(t) >^2 \right]^{1/2}, \tag{6}$$

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 where

13:20

$$h(t) = \frac{1}{L_x \times L_y} \sum_{\tau} h(\tau, t), \tag{7}$$

 $h(\tau, t)$ is the thickness of the film at site $\tau = (x, y)$ and t is the time.

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3 Results and Discussion

We have performed a series of MD simulations of the growing films on the solid surfaces. Both, the surface and the gas atoms are of the same kind. It means that the all the parameters of the interaction potentials are the same for all the atoms in the system. In different simulation runs the temperature T^* , the rate of deposition V, and the size of simulation cell was changed. However, the initial kinetic energy of arriving atoms was kept constant and equal to 18eV.

At the beginning of a single run, we simulated the growth of the film at the selected temperature and the rate of deposition. Next, the obtained system was equilibrated at the same temperature. During these two simulation steps we calculated the thermodynamic and the dynamical data. The averages of the interesting quantities were accumulated after each 50 - 100 time steps. The number of steps used for the equilibration ranged from 10^4 to 10^6 .

Figure 1 shows an example of the typical configurations obtained during the simulation at the temperature $T^* = 0.5$ and for the deposition rate equal to 1/100 (i.e. 1 atom was created after each 100 time steps). The curve of the total energy shown in figure 2 exhibits a jump at the temperature of about $T_m^* = 0.68$. At this temperature the film starts to melt [14]. The heat capacity curve, given in the inset to figure 2, confirms this behaviour. Moreover, for different rates of deposition the melting temperature was almost the same.

In the case of thin layer deposition it is very important to know what mechanism

October 17, 2007 Page 9 of 31

Molecular Physics

governs the growth process. As we have already mentioned, there are three modes of growth that depend on atom mobility on the surfaces. The films often grow with the Volmer-Weber mode in a fast deposition process. The results of the film growth obtained for V = 1/20 at four different temperatures are presented in figure 3, where we plotted the number of atoms in each layer as functions of simulation time for the first four layers. Note that in this case the system size was $16 \times 16 \times 50$, so the full coverage of any layer corresponded to 256 deposited atoms. We see that before completely filling the first layer, the second and next higher layers start to be filled. At high temperature, $T^* = 1.0$, considerable fluctuation in the particle number density per layer appear and the growth rate drops substantially due to lower sticking ratio. From the results presented here it arises that the film grows according to the Volmer-Weber mode.

We have also calculated roughness that appears during the deposition and the equilibration. Typical shape of the curves obtained at the deposition stage is given in figure 4. The curves plotted here were obtained from interpolation of original data. They seem to confirm the mechanism of film growth according to the Volmer-Weber mode. The roughness in figure 4 attains a maximum value for the coverage equal about two monolayers (with 256 atoms per layer). Moreover, the position of roughness maximum is almost independent on the simulation temperature. Next, the roughness becomes smaller and starts rising as the result of an increasing film thickness. Above the coverage equal to eight monolayers the surface roughness increases linearly. The final value of roughness at the end of the deposition is larger at higher temperature. This situation does not change after equilibration of the systems. The curves of roughness posses the minimum value for the higher coverage with decreasing the temperature. The diffusion ability of the growing surface atoms increases with increase in temperature. In higher temperature the

13:20

Molecular Physics

adsorbed atoms faster fill up the inner voids of the film.

Figure 5 exhibits relationship between the roughness created during the deposition and the system size at the temperature equal to 0.4. The maximum of the roughness increases with an increase of the system size for all systems under study, in accordance with the scaling theory [15]. Simultaneously, for larger systems the maximum of the roughness shifts slightly towards lower thickness of the adsorbed layer.

In figure 6 we present the evolution of the mean biaxial stress, $S_{xy} = (S_{xx} + S_{yy})/2$, versus the number of adsorbed layers for different system sizes. The rate of deposition equals 1/100 and the temperature is $T^* = 0.4$. The value of the maximum stress falls down with the increasing system size. The position of the stress maximum corresponds to coverage of about two monolayers and is slightly shifted towards higher film thickness for larger systems. In order to explain the observed stress evolution we performed calculations of the mean biaxial stress for each deposited layer separately. A typical result for separate monolayer contributions is given in figure 7. We observe that the shape of the function describing the stress versus the coverage in the first monolayer agrees with the shape of the curve for the mean biaxial stress obtained for all the deposited atoms (figure 6). Moreover, the stress in the next monolayers exhibits only little changes towards the compressive stress. These changes are much smaller than the changes of the stress in the first monolayer. Thus, the first monolayer yields the most important contribution to the mean biaxial stress of the deposited film.

Figure 8 displays the biaxial stress S_{xy} and the normal stress S_{zz} versus the number of deposited atoms, obtained for the growth rate equal to V = 1/100 at different temperatures. The shape and the behaviour of the curves are quite different at different temperatures. Our simulations also indicated that the 13:20

Molecular Physics

behaviour of stress strongly depends on the deposition rate. Moreover, the change of interatomic distances or adsorption of atoms from the gas may also lead to changes of the stress. However, we should stress again that the appearance of the stress maximum at the coverage equal to about two layers is characteristic.

The maximum value of the biaxial stress strongly depends on the temperature and decreases with increasing the temperature of the substrate. Such evolution of the biaxial stress is often linked with a change in the grain structure of thin films. In contrast to the biaxial stress, the stress in normal direction is less sensitive to the number of deposited atoms and its value is smaller when compared with the value of biaxial stress. In this case, we do not observe stress in the normal direction at the first stage. When the biaxial stress achieves its maximum value we also observe an increase in the normal stress. After that, the value of the normal stress becomes smaller and tends to zero. At a high temperature the majority of individual atoms is on the surface, but at lower temperature there are individual atoms in the space between grains. That difference explains the faster changes in biaxial stress in compressive direction for $T^* = 0.4$.

4 Conclusion

The results of molecular dynamics simulation of the film growth, morphology and stress evolution during atoms deposition have been presented. The simulations show that the films grow with the Volmer-Weber mode and a typical behaviour of the stress for this kind of films has been observed. The main contribution to the stress in films comes from the first monolayer. This is a consequence of the strong affect of the substrate. The effect of the substrate decreases with increasing film thickness. With the increasing system temperature the value of the maximum stress decreases. The roughness exhibits a maximum value at the coverage equal

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two monolayers. The final value of the roughness at the end of the deposition is

larger at higher temperature.

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October 17, 2007 Page 13 of 31

Molecular Physics

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Figure captions:

Fig.1: Three-dimensional configurations obtained from simulations at $T^* = 0.5$ with the deposition rate equal to 1/100. The numbers of deposited atoms are: a) 100, b) 500, c) 1500, d) 3000. At the bottom there is the solid wall, above which the deposited film grows.

Fig.2: The total energy versus the reduced temperature at the different deposition rates. In the inset the plot of the heat capacity (C_v) vs. temperature is presented.

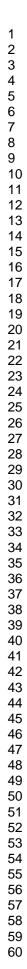
Fig. 3: The number of atoms in successive adatom layers (from left to right) as a function of molecular dynamics simulation time steps for different temperatures. The rate of deposition is equal to 1/20.

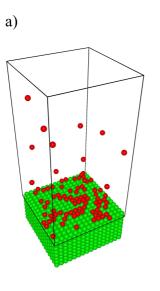
Fig. 4: The interpolated roughness of the growing film as a function of the number of deposited atoms for different temperatures, given in the picture.

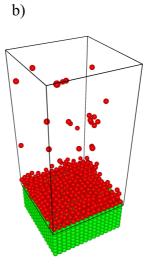
Fig. 5: The roughness of the growing film as a function of the number of deposited atoms for different system size. The rate of deposition is equal to 1/100 and $T^* = 0.40$.

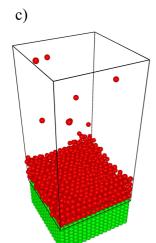
Fig. 6: The stress evolution in the growing film vs. the number of deposited atoms for selected temperatures. The deposition rate is equal to 1/100. S_{xy} is the mean biaxial stress and S_{zz} is a normal stress.

Fig. 7: The dependence of the mean biaxial stress in selected layers on coverage. The rate of deposition is equal to 1/100 and $T^* = 0.40$. The simulation cell is $20 \times 20 \times 50$. 13:20









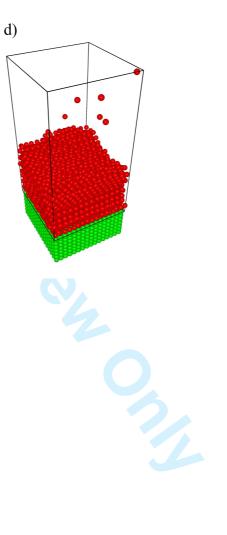


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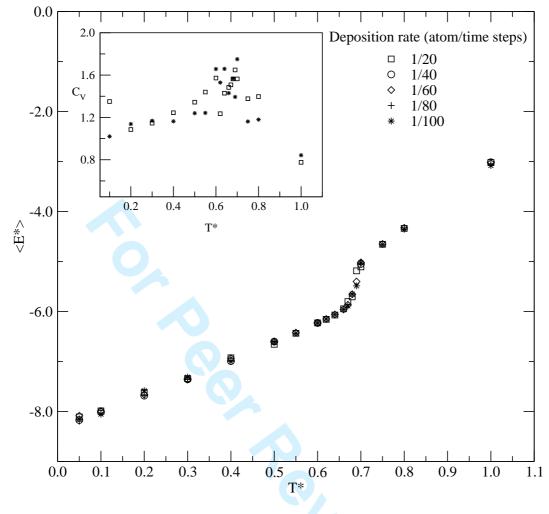


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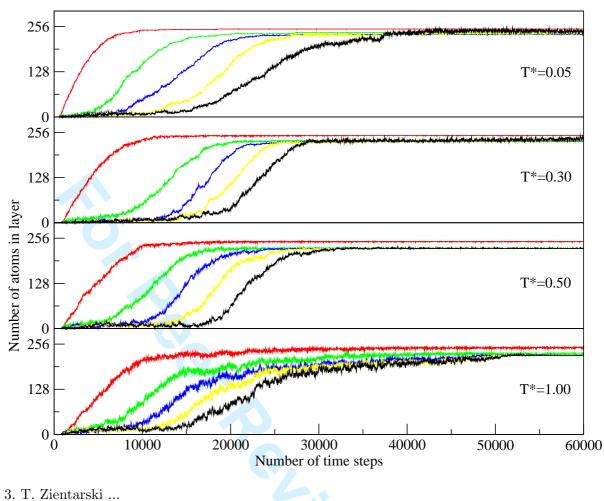
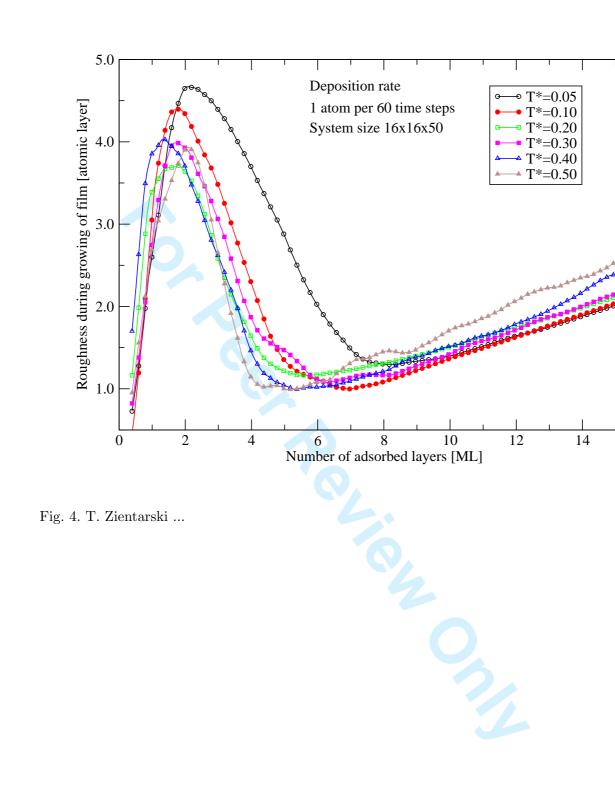
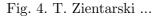


Fig. 3. T. Zientarski ...





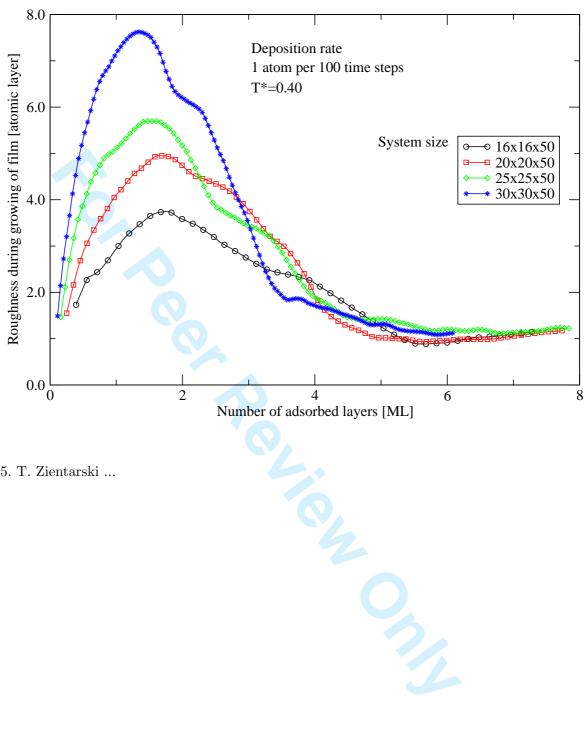
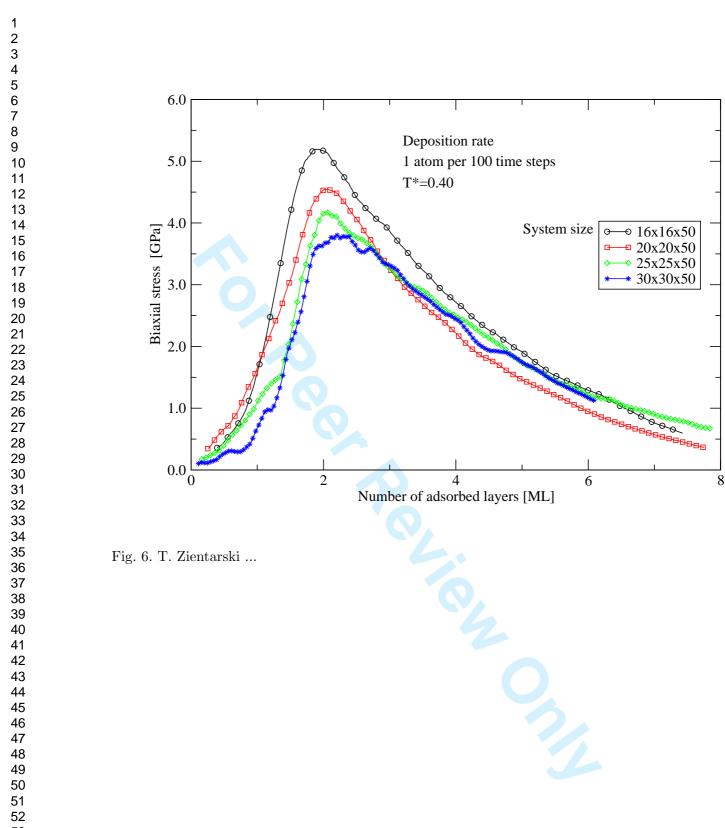


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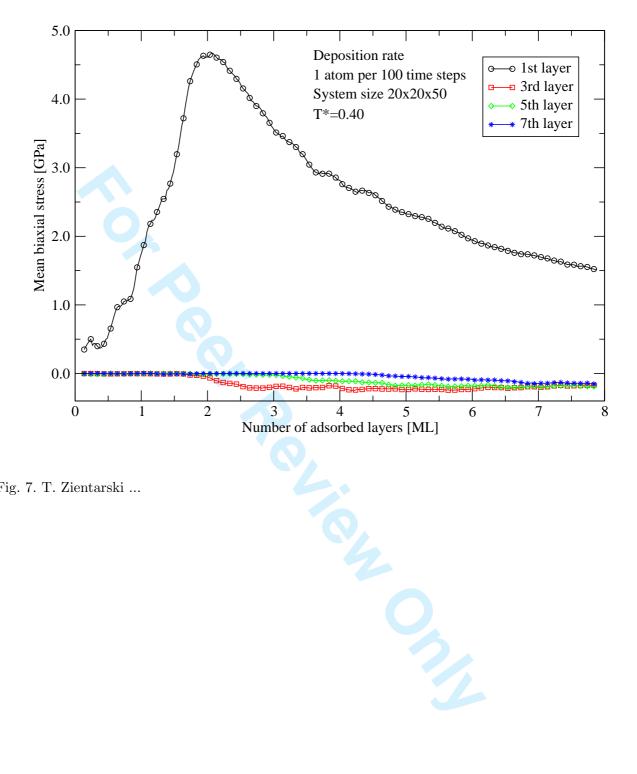


Fig. 7. T. Zientarski ...

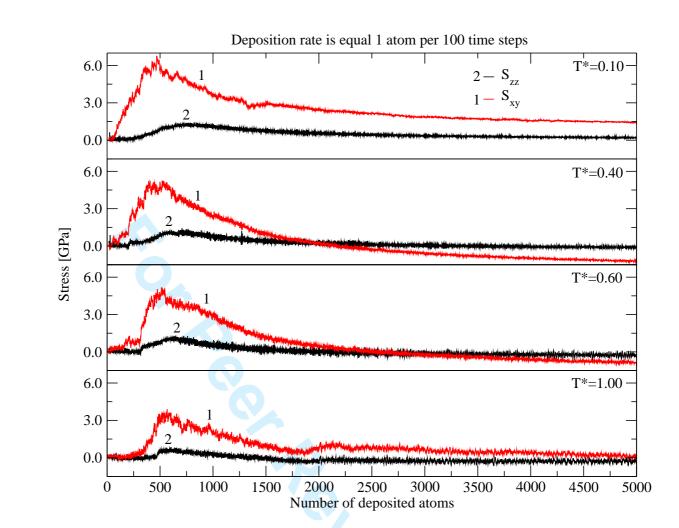


Fig. 8. T. Zientarski ...

