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Citation: Applied Physics Letters 85, 2035 (2004); doi: 10.1063/1.1786653
View online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.1786653
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Layer-by-layer and pseudo-two-dimensional growth modes for heteroepitaxial Ba Ti O$_3$ films by exploiting kinetic limitations
Three-dimensional heteroepitaxy in self-assembled BaTiO$_3$–CoFe$_2$O$_4$ nanostructures

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(Received 9 March 2004; accepted 25 June 2004)

Self-assembled BaTiO$_3$–CoFe$_2$O$_4$ complex oxide nanostructures have been synthesized by pulsed laser deposition. A single ceramic target with a molar ratio of 0.62BaTiO$_3$–0.38CoFe$_2$O$_4$ was used. Spinel CoFe$_2$O$_4$ and perovskite BaTiO$_3$ phases spontaneously separated during heteroepitaxial growth on a single-crystal SrTiO$_3$ (001) substrate. The nanostructures are epitaxial in-plane as well as out-of-plane, with CoFe$_2$O$_4$ nanopillar arrays embedded in a BaTiO$_3$ matrix. The CoFe$_2$O$_4$ nanopillars have uniform size and spacing and nearly circular cross section. As the substrate temperature increases from 750 to 950°C, the average diameter of the pillars increases from ~9 to ~70 nm. © 2004 American Institute of Physics. [DOI: 10.1063/1.1786653]

Nanostructured materials have shown significant promise for a wide range of electronic, optoelectronic, and magnetic applications. The creation of nanostructures with uniform size and spacing in epitaxial heterostructures through self-assembly offers great potential to tailor the physical properties and explore the fabrication of new functional devices. In semiconductor systems, the growth of self-assembled strained coherent island heterostructures has been intensively studied both theoretically and experimentally. However, such structures have rarely been reported in complex oxide thin films. In the present work, we report on a simple yet general approach to form spinel-perovskite nanostructures by self-assembly in thin film heteroepitaxy.

The approach is based on two concepts. The first is the intrinsic similarity in crystal chemistry between perovskites and spinels, both of which are based on an octahedral oxygen coordination. This leads to crystal lattice parameters that are reasonably commensurate. The second key aspect is the fact that although many of these complex oxides can accommodate considerable cationic solid solution solubility, the perovskite/spinel system behaves like line compounds. That is, these compounds have very little solid solubility into each other (for example, the spinel in the perovskite). These two aspects then present an interesting opportunity to create perovskite-spinel nanostructures through a spontaneous phase separation process. The two phases in the nanostructure simultaneously can be epitaxial with respect to each other as well as with respect to a common substrate [which, for example, could be a single crystal (001) perovskite]. We illustrate this concept through a prototypical example of the BaTiO$_3$–CoFe$_2$O$_4$ system. BaTiO$_3$–CoFe$_2$O$_4$ is an interesting magnetoelectric system since BaTiO$_3$ is ferroelectric with large piezoelectricity and CoFe$_2$O$_4$ is ferrimagnetic with large magnetostriiction. We have recently reported that thin films of such a system form vertically aligned two-phase nanostructures and show strong magnetoelectric coupling of the order parameters through elastic interactions between the two phases. At room temperature, BaTiO$_3$ has a perovskite structure with lattice parameters $a=0.399$ nm and $c=0.404$ nm, while CoFe$_2$O$_4$ has a spinel structure with a lattice parameter of $a=0.838$ nm or approximately twice the basic building block of BaTiO$_3$. There is a ~5% lattice mismatch between the two structures. By selecting a suitable substrate with similar crystal structure, such as SrTiO$_3$, we present the tantalizing possibility of heteroepitaxy in three-dimensions (i.e., both in-plane as well as out-of-plane) in the film. In the present manuscript we report a detailed study of the structure of the nanocomposite as well as the growth kinetics.

The BaTiO$_3$–CoFe$_2$O$_4$ nanostructured thin films studied in this work were deposited on SrTiO$_3$ (001) substrates using pulsed laser deposition with a KrF ($\lambda=248$ nm) excimer laser. A single ceramic target with molar ratio of 0.62BaTiO$_3$–0.38CoFe$_2$O$_4$ was used. The substrate temperature was varied in the range of 700–950°C and a dynamic chamber pressure of 100 m Torr O$_2$ was maintained during deposition. Films with thickness of ~400 nm were deposited at a growth rate of ~10 nm/min and a laser density of 1.2 J/cm$^2$. After the deposition, the samples were cooled to room temperature in 1 atm oxygen ambient at a cooling rate of 5°C/min. The films were characterized by x-ray diffraction using Cu K$_\alpha$ radiation in a Siemens D5000 four-circle diffractometer and by transmission electron microscopy (TEM) using a JEOL 4000FX operating at 300 kV.

A typical x-ray $\theta$–$2\theta$ diffraction spectrum [Fig. 1(a)] shows that the film has (00l) oriented structure with high crystallinity. The spectrum contains three sets of diffraction peaks that can be assigned, respectively, to (00l) spinel CoFe$_2$O$_4$ and (00l) perovskite BaTiO$_3$ in addition to (00l) reflections from the SrTiO$_3$ substrate. The observation of distinct peaks for BaTiO$_3$ and CoFe$_2$O$_4$ indicates that the two
phases coexist in the film. The \( \phi \) scans of the (202) peak for Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) phase and (404) peak for CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) phase of the film as well as (202) peaks for the substrate are presented in Fig. 1(b). The fourfold symmetry indicates a "cube-on-cube" epitaxy of both Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) and CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) on Sr\( \text{TiO}_3 \), as well as an in-plane epitaxy between the two phases in the film. Selected area electron diffraction patterns confirmed the epitaxial growth orientation relationship: [100]\( \text{SrTiO}_3 \)//[100]Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \)//[100]CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \).

Figure 2(a) is a dark field TEM image obtained using the CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) (130) spot from a cross-sectional sample grown at 920\( ^\circ \)C. The image shows that the CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) phase has a columnar structure. The CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) pillars are separated by the Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) matrix and extend through the whole film from the film/substrate interface to the surface (with an aspect ratio of \( \sim \) 12). It is interesting that all the pillars grow out of the matrix, forming islands that extend above the surface of the Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) matrix with a height of 10–15 nm as can be seen in Fig. 2(b). This can be explained by the heteroepitaxial growth feature of the film. Namely, the \( c \) lattice parameters of Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) and CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) calculated from the XRD and electron diffraction patterns are \( c = 0.404 \) nm for Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) and \( c = 0.834 \) nm for CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \). There are about 990 unit cells of Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) along the film growth thickness of 400 nm. We assume approximately 990/2 units of CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) along the pillars. Therefore, the calculated height of CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) pillars is \( \sim 412.8 \) nm, which is in agreement with the experimentally observed value (410–415 nm). The high resolution TEM image in Fig. 2(c) shows that dislocations form at the interface between the CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) pillars and the Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) matrix, which partially relax the lattice mismatch strain between the two phases. However, a residual strain of 0.4% in the CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) pillars still remains.

Figure 3(a) is a TEM plan view image taken from the sample deposited at 920\( ^\circ \)C. It shows that the CoFe\( \text{O}_4 \) nanopillars are homogeneously distributed in the Ba\( \text{TiO}_3 \) matrix, with an average size of the pillars increases from \( \sim 9 \) to \( \sim 70 \) nm as the deposition temperature increases from 750 to 950\( ^\circ \)C, respect-
tively. No phase separation was observed at 700°C at the
growth rate of 10 nm/min. Deposition temperatures in this
study were restricted to ≤950°C due to the operating tem-
perature limit of our heater. In the temperature range of
750–950°C, the temperature dependence of the lateral di-
dimensions of the nanopillars can be fitted to an Arrhenius
behavior, which suggests a diffusion controlled growth
mechanism, see Fig. 3(b). Plan view high resolution TEM
images show that in the temperature range studied all the
pillars are single crystals with sharp interfaces with the ma-
rix. Figure 3(c) is a high resolution TEM image of one
CoFe2O4 pillar embedded in the BaTiO3 matrix, which
was taken from the sample grown at 950°C. A periodic disloca-
tion array was found at the interface [Fig. 3(d)], which re-
laxes the lattice mismatch strain between the two phases. It
is interesting to note that the nanopillars have fairly circular
cross section with very small microfaceting even at the high
growth temperature [Fig. 3(c)]. Faceting does not occur in
this system probably because of the increase in interfacial
energy that would be produced by sharp corners.

The formation of self-organized epitaxial arrays of
CoFe2O4 columns in a BaTiO3 matrix in thin films is a pro-
cess directed by both thermodynamic equilibrium and kinetic
diffusion. In bulk, BaTiO3 and CoFe2O4 are essentially line
compounds with very small mutual solubilities.4 Given ad-
quate kinetic conditions, phase separation is expected due to
the thermodynamic instability of the solutions at the growth
temperature. The size evolution of the CoFe2O4 nanopillars
with growth temperature in the present case, with fine pillars
at low temperature and coarser pillars at higher temperature,
indicates that the growth of the pillars is kinetically con-
trolled by surface diffusion during growth.8,9 It is a very
interesting question as to why CoFe2O4 forms pillars in this
system. There are several factors that have to be consid-
ered to answer the question. One is the lattice mismatch of
the film to substrate, and the lattice mismatch between the two
phases in the film. Another is the difference in Young’s
modulus of the two phases.10 The volume fraction of the two
phases and the crystal structure of the substrate (i.e., perov-
skite, or spinel) could also play a role. In order to identify
which is the drive force to the formation of the nanopillar
structure (as well as the phase that forms the nanopillar),
systematic studies are required; such studies are in progress
and the results will be published in future publications.11

In conclusion, self-organized CoFe2O4–BaTiO3 nano-
structures exhibiting three-dimensional heteroepitaxial
have been successfully synthesized by heteroepitaxial
growth. The growth of the pillars is kinetically controlled.
The CoFe2O4 nanopillars have a narrow size distribution and
are homogeneously distributed in a BaTiO3 matrix. This ap-
proach to the formation of self-assembled nanostructures is
generic, and can be applied to other perovskite-spinel sys-
tems.

The work is supported by the NSF-MRSEC under Con-
tract No. DMR-00-80008. The NSF-MRSEC has provided
support for the Pulsed Laser Deposition System used in this
research.

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