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SUPERCONDUCTING PROPERTIES OF ALUMINIUM THIN FILMS AFTER ION IMPLANTATION AT LIQUID HELIUM TEMPERATURES (*)

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Résumé. — La température critique de films minces d'aluminium a été mesurée après implantation d'ions Al, O, He, D et H à des températures inférieures à 6 K, sans réchauffement des échantillons. Les résultats dépendent de la dose et du profil d'implantation, ainsi que des défauts créés. Les limites supérieures des températures critiques obtenues se trouvent entre 2,7 K et 4,1 K après implantation de Al, O et He. Elle atteint 6,75 K pour H, à une concentration moyenne proche de AlH₂.

Abstract. — Using a recent modification of the Orsay ion implantor, Al, O, He, H and D were implanted into Al thin films at temperatures below 6 K. The critical temperature $T_c$ of the implanted films depends on the implanted ion dose and range distribution as well as on radiation damage effects. The higher limit of $T_c$ ranges from 2.7 K to 4.1 K for Al, O and He implantations. It reaches 6.75 K for H, at an average concentration near AlH₂.

It is well-known [1] that the superconducting transition temperature $T_c$ of metals is sensitive to changes in the electron-phonon interaction (hence in the phonon spectrum) as well as in the electronic density of states $N(0)$ at the Fermi surface. In the case of weak-coupling superconductors such as Al, structural changes (disordering) tend to produce fairly large increases in $T_c$, an effect which is generally ascribed to a softening of the phonon spectrum. Specifically, $T_c$ for Al films evaporated on cold (~ 4.2 K) substrates has been increased from 1.16 K to 3.3 K [2, 3]. Co-evaporation techniques [3, 5] produce films with $T_c$ values up to 6.6 K; the increase in $T_c$ may not necessarily then be due to disorder alone [5], since such films generally display a granular structure as shown both by X-ray diffraction and very high measured resistivities (ca $10^4 \mu\Omega\cdot cm$, while the resistivity of cold substrate evaporated Al is typically 10-50 $\mu\Omega\cdot cm$). In this work we have used another method of modifying the phonon spectrum as well as $N(0)$. Ion implantation into Al films at liquid He temperatures produces radiation damage resulting in disorder but solid solutions of practically any element with the Al host can be produced. In contrast to room temperature experiments [6] the advantage of very low-temperature implantation [7] lies in the fact that neither the implanted impurity nor the related radiation induced defects are mobile. Resistivity annealing experiments can then provide information on migration energies and their relation to $T_c$ [9]. In this work the effect of radiation damage and lattice distortion was studied via Al- and He- ion implantation; in order to evaluate the possible effect of the recoil-implanted O ions from the surface oxide layer, a study of oxygen implantations was also carried out. A possible influence of optical phonon modes has been underlined by recent experiments on the Pd-H systems [7]: we have performed H- and D-implantations in order to search for similar effects in Al.

In all the cases studied here, ion implantation produced large increases in $T_c$ (in the case of H-
implantation, we report the highest $T_c$ yet obtained with an Al host). A comparison of the $T_c$-values, and their relation to the corresponding film residual resistivities leads us to consider: (i) the difference between lattice distortion or amorphization and lattice disorder due to radiation damage, as well as; (ii) various possible explanations of the rather striking effect of H and D on $T_c$.

Aluminium films (typically $10 \times 0.3$ mm$^2$, thickness $1300-1650$ Å) were prepared by Al evaporation on crystalline quartz substrates from a tungsten crucible in a standard bell-jar vacuum. Their resistivity ratio $\rho (300 \text{ K})/\rho (4.2 \text{ K})$ was typically 2.7. Superconducting transition temperatures before implantation were 1.4 K, the transitions being fairly broad ($\sim 0.7$ K) probably due to film edge effects. All ion implantations were carried out with the Orsay ion implantor [8], to which a liquid helium cryostat has been adapted, allowing both low temperature implantation (and implanted ion dose measurements) and resistivity measurements after implantation. With typical ion beam currents of 5-10 µA (1), the estimated target temperature was lower than 10 K; the temperature measured immediately after turning off the beam was $\leq 6$ K on the copper sample holder. Implantation energies were adjusted in order to obtain fairly uniform ion distributions in the host and to avoid proximity effects (the estimated coherence length is $\sim 500$ Å). Thus for Al-implantation, a single implantation of 50 keV Al$^{++}$ was sufficient; for H-implantation, three implantations were performed at about 10, 5 and 2.5 keV/amu respectively. As discussed in [9], precise values of the implanted sample resistivity were difficult to obtain. However it is certain that the average resistivity of the films did not exceed values between about 10 $\mu\Omega$.cm and about 50 $\mu\Omega$.cm for the H-implanted film. The resistivity measurements were performed using a standard four-point probe technique; the temperature was monitored by a calibrated carbon resistor.

For the Al-implanted sample, $T_c$ was measured repeatedly after a succession of 50-keV Al$^{++}$ implantations at varying doses. For the other ions, the same procedure was followed, first at an energy corresponding to long-range implantation, then when a maximum $T_c$ was found at an energy corresponding to shorter range implantation (adjusted in terms of the implanted ion profile [10] as well as the coherence length) and so on.

Table I presents our main results on $T_c$ and the superconducting transitions at $T_c^{\text{max}}$ are shown in figure 1. The behaviour of the Al-H and Al-D samples is found to be qualitatively different from that of the other implanted alloys. We shall discuss the latter first.

Al-implantation should only produce radiation damage. Using standard collision theory evaluations, we estimate that each atom in the film has been displaced approximately 10 times on the average. This could have been expected to produce amorphization of the film and hence increase its resistivity and $T_c$ value near to that observed for cold-substrate evaporated films (i.e. $\sim 3.7$ K [3]). Our result does not substantiate this view. Oxygen-implantation was originally undertaken to determine the effect of recoil implantation by Al ions. Considering the results obtained here, the $T_c$ value for Al-implantation could indeed largely correspond to surface oxygen recoil implantation according to a rough estimate based on [11] (it should be noted that due to cryopumping, a number of light atomic species may form a surface layer on our samples and suffer recoil implantation as well). Since chemically inert He produces a very similar value of $T_c$ (albeit at higher doses), it seems unlikely that the increase in $T_c$ has a purely electronic origin. On the other hand, the radiation damage produced by O and — especially — He is far smaller than that due to Al, since light ion slowing-down is mainly due to so-called electronic stopping (which

**TABLE I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implanted ion</th>
<th>Film thickness (Å)</th>
<th>Implantation energy (keV)</th>
<th>(Implanted dose) (at. cm$^{-2}$)</th>
<th>$T_c^{\text{max}}$ (K)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al$^{++}$</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$3 \times 10^{16}$</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O$^+$</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$10^{17}$</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He$^+$</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$10^{17}$</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H$_2^+$</td>
<td>1650</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$10^{18}$</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 1. — Shape of superconducting transition curves for samples producing highest measured transition temperatures.

(1) For the high dose H-implantation, ion currents up to 30 µA were used.
does not produce atomic displacements). This leads
us to suggest that, for O- and He-implanted Al, the
increase in $T_c$ is due to the softening of the phonon
spectrum via lattice distortion produced by the light
ions themselves (as well as by the accompanying low
damage density) while the highly localized energy
deposition of heavier ions (Al) [12] does not necessa-
riely produce the large overall lattice disorder needed
to lower the average phonon frequencies. The $T_c^{\text{max}}$
value found for O and He could correspond to the
disorder limit: it would then be far lower than the
prediction of [1].

The broad superconducting transitions observed
in all these cases can be accounted for on the basis of
varying degrees of lattice disorder in the implantation
profiles (this is in contrast to the H(D) results
discussed below).

Hydrogen and deuterium implantation lead to far
to higher superconducting transition temperatures and
remarkably sharp transitions. This is in contrast to the
value (4.1 K) obtained [4] for a co-evaporated,
high-resistivity Al-H films. The value of $T_c^{\text{max}}$
for H-implanted Al is also higher than that (6.6 K) found
in the case of Al-Ge films [5]. It is well known that
H(D) is interstitial in metals such as Al, because of its
small size and because of charge screening effects
(he interstitial nature of H in Al shows up clearly
in the resistivity measurements of [9]). This favours
lattice distortion, but other effects-related to the
electronic density of states or the electron-phonon
interaction [1] should also be considered. For example,
the electronic density of states could be increased by
H(D)-Al bonding (note also possible effects on the
Brillouin zone limits) or by the formation of an ordered
compound (the average concentration is close to
AlH$_2$). Alternatively, a high concentration of ordered
H(D) could lead to an optical phonon branch and thus
to an enhanced attraction between electrons due to
the electron-optical phonon coupling as was
recently found for the Pd-H(D) systems [13].

We cannot now give any conclusion about the
isotope-effect: a new experiment is being conducted
before (a) and after (b) disordering by a weak Al-ion dose (see text).

If the existence of high $T_c$ values bears more than
a chance relation to optical phonon modes, hydrogen-
implantation will be an extremely useful tool for
systematic investigations of metal-hydrogen alloys.

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