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Balamurugan Balasubramanian
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, balamurugan@unl.edu

Ralph Skomski
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rskomski2@unl.edu

Xingzhong Li
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, xli2@unl.edu

George C. Hadjipanayis
University of Delaware, hadji@udel.edu

David J. Sellmyer
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, dsellmyer@unl.edu

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Magnetism of directly ordered Sm-Co clusters

B. Balamurugan,^{1,2,a)} R. Skomski,^{1,2} X. Z. Li,^{1,2} G. C. Hadjipanayis,³ and D. J. Sellmyer^{1,2}

¹Nebraska Center for Materials and Nanoscience, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588, USA

²Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588, USA

³Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19716, USA

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Sm-Co bulk alloys have shown superior permanent-magnet properties, but research on Sm-Co nanoparticles is challenging because of the need to control particle size, size-distribution, crystalline ordering, and phase purity. In the present study, a cluster-deposition method was used to produce Sm-Co nanoparticles having desired crystal structures without the requirement of subsequent high-temperature thermal annealing. Poorly crystallized SmCo₅ nanoparticles exhibit a low room-temperature coercivity of only 100 Oe, whereas crystalline SmCo₅ and Sm₂Co₁₇ nanoparticles show room-temperature coercivities of 2000 and 750 Oe, respectively. The direct synthesis of Sm-Co nanoparticles having sizes of less than 10 nm and a high degree of atomic ordering is an important step toward creating nanoparticle building blocks for permanent-magnets and other significant applications. © 2012 American Institute of Physics. [doi:10.1063/1.3677668]

Bulk Sm-Co alloys have long been valued in permanent magnetism, especially SmCo₅ and Sm₂Co₁₇, which crystallize in the hexagonal CaCu₅ and rhombohedral Th₂Zn₁₇-type structures, respectively.^{1–3} These materials exhibit high room-temperature magnetic anisotropy constants (K_1), namely 22×10^7 ergs/cm³ (SmCo₅) and 3×10^7 ergs/cm³ (Sm₂Co₁₇), along with high Curie temperatures ($T_c > 1020$ K) and appreciable magnetic polarizations ($J_s > 10$ kG).^{3,4} The research on Sm-Co nanoparticles is, however, challenged by the requirement of high-temperature annealing above 800 °C for alloy formation and crystalline ordering, which results in poor control of size, size-distribution, and phase purity.^{5–8}

SmCo₅ and Sm₂Co₁₇ nanoparticles have previously been prepared by surfactant-assisted ball milling of bulk Sm-Co alloys, but these nanoparticles show a very low room-temperature coercivity of ≤ 100 Oe and a substantial reduction of magnetization due to the presence of surfactants, incomplete ordering, and oxidation.⁵ In addition, ball milling process induces strains and amorphization and also leads to the decomposition of the Sm-rich SmCo₅ phase.⁸ Low-temperature wet chemical polyol process at about 270 °C using Co and Sm metal precursors in the presence of tetraethylene glycol resulted in SmCo₅ nanoparticles of particle sizes less than 20 nm with room temperature coercivities in the range of 100 to 1500 Oe.^{6,7} Recently, the reduction of Sm(III) and Co(II) salts in tetraethylene glycol has been found to yield predominant Co₂C phase with x-diffraction peaks similar to SmCo₅.^{9,10} Our recent work on plasma-condensation-type cluster deposition, performed under high-vacuum conditions, has been shown to reduce rare-earth oxidation and to produce single-phase and crystalline YCo₅ and Y₂Co₁₇ nanoparticles without any high-temperature thermal annealing.¹¹

In the present study, Sm-Co nanoparticles with different stoichiometries, especially SmCo₅ and Sm₂Co₁₇, were produced using a cluster deposition. The experimental setup consists of a cluster-formation chamber having a direct current (DC) magnetron plasma-sputtering discharge with a water-cooled gas-aggregation tube and a deposition chamber, where the substrate is kept at room temperature.^{11,12} An Sm-Co composite target was sputtered using a mixture of Ar and He as sputtering gases to form Sm-Co nanoparticles in the gas-aggregation chamber, which were extracted as a collimated beam traveling toward the substrate in the deposition chamber. The desired stoichiometry and crystalline ordering were directly obtained during the aggregation process by controlling the DC magnetron sputtering power ($P_{dc} = 100 - 200$ W), prior to deposition on suitable substrates. Sm-Co nanoparticles were deposited on single crystalline Si (001) substrates for SQUID magnetometer, energy dispersive x-ray analysis (EDX), and x-ray diffraction (XRD: Rigaku D/Max-B diffractometer, Cu K α with $\lambda = 1.5418$ Å) studies and on carbon coated copper grids for transmission electron microscopy (TEM: JEOL 2010 with an acceleration voltage of 200 kV) measurement.

The compositions and crystal structures of as-produced Sm-Co nanoparticles deposited at different P_{dc} were evaluated using EDX and XRD measurements, respectively. EDX analysis yields compositions corresponding to SmCo₅ for $100 \leq P_{dc} \leq 160$ W and Sm₂Co₁₇ for $180 \leq P_{dc} \leq 200$ W (not shown here). The crystalline ordering of these nanoparticles also strongly depends on P_{dc} , as shown in the XRD patterns of Fig. 1, which include the standard positions and relative intensities of diffraction peaks corresponding to hexagonal CaCu₅ (blue vertical-solid lines) and rhombohedral Th₂Zn₁₇-type (red vertical-dotted lines).^{13,14} Note that the maximum intensity diffraction peak corresponding to both the structures appears at angles of $2\theta = 39^\circ - 45^\circ$ as revealed by the standard data.

^{a)}Author to whom correspondence should be addressed. Electronic mail: bbalamurugan2@unl.edu.

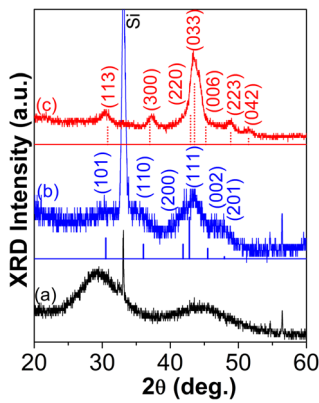


FIG. 1. (Color online) XRD patterns of Sm-Co nanoparticles prepared at different sputtering powers (P_{dc}): (a) SmCo_5 ($P_{dc} = 100$ W), (b) SmCo_5 ($P_{dc} = 160$ W), and (c) $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ ($P_{dc} = 200$ W). The standard peak positions corresponding to the hexagonal CaCu_5 (blue solid-vertical lines) and rhombohedral $\text{Th}_2\text{Zn}_{17}$ (red dotted-vertical lines) structures are also given.

The XRD pattern of the as-produced SmCo_5 nanoparticles deposited at a low P_{dc} of 100 W shows only a broad and weak diffraction peak in the higher-angle region, along with another broad peak in the lower-angle region ($2\theta = 23^\circ - 36^\circ$), and thus reveals a poor crystalline ordering in these nanoparticles, as noted in Fig. 1(a). On increasing $P_{dc} = 160$ W, the diffraction peaks corresponding to CaCu_5 become visible and intense at higher angles, as noted in Fig. 1(b), revealing the improvement in the crystalline ordering. However, the XRD pattern of as-produced $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles deposited at a high P_{dc} of 200 W has intense and sharp diffraction peaks, which are in good agreement with the standard diffraction lines corresponding to the rhombohedral $\text{Th}_2\text{Zn}_{17}$ -type structure, as noted in Fig. 1(c).

Note that some of the diffraction peaks separated by only a small angular position are indistinguishable, Figs. 1(b) and 1(c), because they have broad peaks resulting from their nanoparticle nature. The average particle size and size distribution of the Sm-Co nanoparticles were investigated using TEM. For example, the TEM micrograph of Fig. 2(a) and the corresponding particle-size histogram of SmCo_5 nanoparticles prepared at $P_{dc} = 160$ W exhibit an average particle size (d in Fig. 2(a)) of 8.4 nm and an rms standard deviation of $\alpha/d \approx 0.20$. $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles deposited at a high power of 200 W exhibit an average particle size $d \approx 10.8$ nm with $\alpha/d \approx 0.19$ (Fig. 2(b)).

This study revealed a direct crystalline ordering of Sm-Co nanoparticles during the cluster-aggregation process by varying P_{dc} without subsequent high-temperature thermal annealing. However, Sm-Co intermetallics are characterized by small enthalpy differences per atom, as exemplified by SmCo_5 (-6.8 kJ/mol) and $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ (-8.0 kJ/mol), and require a complicated heat treatment for alloy formation and crystallization.¹⁵ In the present study, a high $P_{dc} \geq 160$ W is expected to result in highly energetic and dense ions in the gas aggregation region, which leads to an increase in cluster-collision probability and subsequently provides sufficient energy for crystallization.¹⁶

The magnetic properties of Sm-Co nanoparticles were investigated by measuring the magnetization M as a function

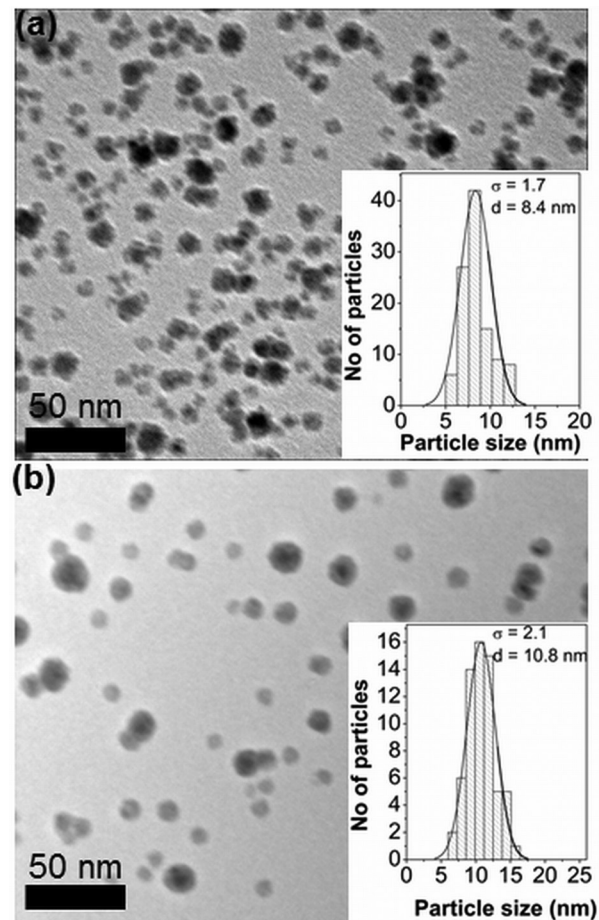


FIG. 2. Transmission electron microscope images of the cluster-deposited (a) SmCo_5 and (b) $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles, whereas the corresponding particle size histograms are given as an inset. σ and d are the standard deviation and average particle size, respectively.

of applied magnetic field H at 300 and 10 K. Figure 3 shows room-temperature hysteresis loops for Sm-Co nanoparticles prepared at different P_{dc} . Poorly crystalline SmCo_5 nanoparticles prepared at $P_{dc} = 100$ W exhibit a very low coercivity (H_c) of 100 Oe and a remanence ratio of $M_r/M_s = 0.23$ at 300 K, as noted in Fig. 3(a), where M_r and M_s are the remanent and saturation magnetizations, respectively. The soft-magnetic behavior in these nanoparticles is caused by reduced magnetocrystalline anisotropy due to the poor crystallinity.

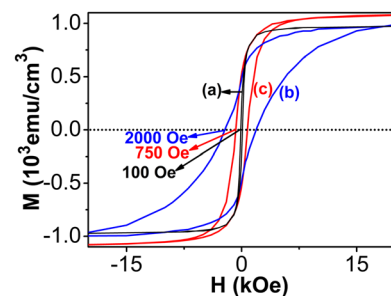


FIG. 3. (Color online) Room-temperature hysteresis loops for (a) poorly crystallized SmCo_5 , (b) crystalline SmCo_5 and (c) crystalline $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles prepared at different sputtering powers of 100, 160, and 200 W, respectively.

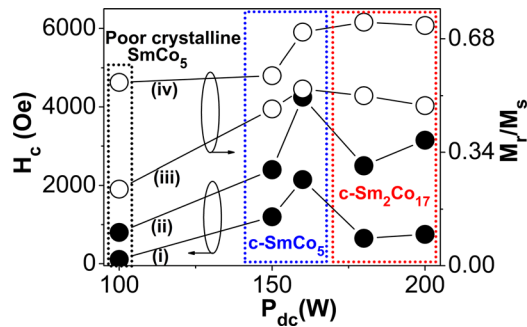


FIG. 4. (Color online) Magnetic properties of Sm-Co nanoparticles as a function of DC magnetron sputtering power P_{dc} : Coercivities (H_c) at (i) 300 K and (ii) 10 K and remanence ratios (M_r/M_s) at (iii) 300 and (iv) 10 K.

Crystalline SmCo_5 nanoparticles deposited at $P_{dc} = 160$ W exhibit hard-magnetic properties with $H_c = 2000$ Oe and $M_r/M_s = 0.53$ at 300 K, as noted in Fig. 3(b). Crystalline $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles deposited at a large $P_{dc} = 200$ W are softer, with $H_c = 750$ Oe and $M_r/M_s = 0.48$, as presented in Fig. 3(c). This can be attributed to the anisotropy constant of $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$, which is one order smaller than that of SmCo_5 .³ Fig. 3 also shows that crystalline SmCo_5 and $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles exhibit high J_s of 11.1 and 13.8 kG, respectively, which is similar to bulk. As summarized in Fig. 4, the magnetic properties of cluster-deposited Sm-Co nanoparticles measured at 300 and 10 K strongly depend on P_{dc} . H_c and M_r/M_s of Sm-Co nanoparticles are enhanced at 10 K as shown in Fig. 4.

Sm-Co nanostructures are known to exhibit a strong dependence of room-temperature coercivity on particle size.^{8,17} H_c reaches a maximum value for a critical particle size and a further decrease in size leads to a decrease in H_c . This behavior has been attributed due to complex effects of crystalline ordering, surface morphology, and size-induced thermal fluctuations.^{8,17,18} Note that room-temperature coercivities of crystalline SmCo_5 and $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles are in good agreement with the previously reported size-effects on the coercivity of Sm-Co.^{8,17}

In conclusion, crystalline SmCo_5 and $\text{Sm}_2\text{Co}_{17}$ nanoparticles were directly produced using a plasma-condensation-type cluster-deposition method without subsequent high-temperature thermal annealing. The Sm-Co nanoparticles gain sufficient energy from the inert gas ions during the gas-aggregation process for crystallization. SmCo_5 nanoparticles show compar-

tively hard magnetic properties with coercivities of 2000 and 4250 Oe at 300 and 10 K, respectively. The direct ordering of Sm-Co nanoparticles prior to deposition is important for assembling nanoparticle building blocks for practical applications.

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