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Thin film LaYbO₃ capacitive structures grown by pulsed laser deposition

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The crystal structure and the dielectric properties of LaYbO₃ films grown by pulsed laser deposition and integrated in SrRuO₃/LaYbO₃/SrRuO₃ capacitive structures are reported. Two different fabrication procedures are assessed. When the SrRuO₃/LaYbO₃/SrRuO₃ stack is grown in-situ, the relative permittivity of the LaYbO₃ is 35. When instead the lower SrRuO₃ electrode layer is patterned by contact photolithography and argon ion milling, prior to the deposition of the LaYbO₃, the relative permittivity of the LaYbO₃ is 55. In this case, post-growth annealing brings the relative permittivity towards that of the film grown in-situ. In both cases the relative permittivity is higher than the value measured in bulk material. This is attributed to the permittivity being highest along the orthorhombic c-axis. The annealing procedure produced a recrystallization of the LaYbO₃ and of the SrRuO₃.

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1. Introduction

Recently, interlanthanide perovskites (such as LaLuO₃) have been investigated as potential candidates to replace SiO₂ as high-k gate dielectrics, because of their high relative permittivity εr, low leakage current, and suitability for deposition by several techniques such as pulsed laser deposition (PLD), molecular beam deposition and atomic layer deposition [1,2]. These films are also expected to operate well at frequencies ranging from a few Hz to GHz in particular with low dielectric losses. The crystal structure and dielectric properties of LaYbO₃ and LaLuO₃ ceramics have been recently investigated. Relative permittivities of 26 and 22 were determined at room temperature for LaYbO₃ and LaLuO₃ respectively [3,4]. Schubert et al. [5] deposited epitaxial thin films of LaLuO₃ by PLD. In this communication, we report the structure and electrical properties of SrRuO₃/LaYbO₃/SrRuO₃ thin film capacitors also fabricated by PLD.

2. Experimental procedure

2.1. Target preparation

LaYbO₃ ceramic targets were prepared by the conventional mixed oxide route. High-purity grade La₂O₃ and Yb₂O₃ powders (both 99.99% purity, Aldrich Chemical Co., Milwaukee, WI) were weighed in a 1:1 molar ratio and intimately mixed by ball milling for 20 h, using yttria-stabilized zirconia balls. The dried slurry was calcined in air at 1200 °C and then at 1400 °C for periods of 15 h. To enhance sinterability, the calcined powder was re-milled by ball milling for 20 h. The finely milled calcined powder was uniaxially pressed into a 15 mm diameter pellet using an applied pressure of ~190 MPa. This green compact was subsequently fired for 4 h in air at 1600 °C, using a controlled heating-cooling rate of 5 °C/min.

The phase purity and crystallinity of the sintered LaYbO₃ target were determined by X-ray diffraction using a Siemens Model D5000 diffractometer operating with CuKα radiation, λ = 1.54059 Å. A step size of 0.02° and a scan rate of 2°/min were used for the scans.

2.2. Fabrication of the SrRuO₃/LaYbO₃/SrRuO₃ capacitors

SrRuO₃/LaYbO₃/SrRuO₃ thin film tri-layers were grown on (001)-oriented SrTiO₃ substrates by PLD using a KrF excimer laser with a wavelength of 248 nm. A 4 Hz repetition rate was used with the laser beam focused to a spot size of 2.4 mm² on the target, providing a fluence of 3.4 J/cm². The distance between the SrTiO₃ substrate and the target material was set to 5.7 cm. All the films were grown at a
temperature of 780 °C and in flowing oxygen. The pressure was 40 Pa for the SrRuO$_3$ and 40 or 0.40 Pa for the LaYbO$_3$. The deposition rates were 0.012 nm/pulse for SrRuO$_3$ and 0.017 nm/pulse for LaYbO$_3$, corresponding to average growth rates of 0.048 nm s$^{-1}$ and 0.068 nm s$^{-1}$ respectively.

After the thin film deposition the samples were cooled in 90 kPa of static oxygen, with dwells of 15 min at 600 °C and of 30 min at 450 °C during cooling to fully oxygenate the deposited films. This is in agreement with the fabrication procedure employed for other perovskite oxides grown by PLD technique [6–8].

The thin films were patterned by contact photolithography and argon ion beam milling, using a Karl Suss mask aligner and an Oxford Applied Research IM150 ion milling system. S1813 photosist was used to protect the regions of the films which constitute the capacitive structure.

Two different procedures were employed for the fabrication of the SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ capacitors. In the first procedure, the SrRuO$_3$ bottom electrode layer was first grown by PLD and then patterned ex-situ using photolithography and ion-beam milling. Subsequently the SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$ bi-layer was grown. Further ex-situ patterning was performed, again using photolithography followed by ion-beam milling. The SrRuO$_3$ top electrode was defined and windows were opened through the LaYbO$_3$ film to enable electrical contact to the SrRuO$_3$ bottom electrode. A sketch of the side view of a device obtained with the first fabrication procedure is shown in Fig. 1a. In the second fabrication procedure, the SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ tri-layer was grown in-situ. The top electrode geometry was then defined and then windows were opened through the LaYbO$_3$ to contact the bottom electrode. A sketch of the side view of a device obtained with the second fabrication procedure is shown in Fig. 1b. In both cases the following film thicknesses have been employed for the fabrication of the capacitive structures: 150 nm for the SrRuO$_3$ bottom electrode, 580 nm for the LaYbO$_3$ dielectric layer and 100 nm for the SrRuO$_3$ top electrode.

The difference between the two procedures is in the patterning of the bottom electrode layer.

Post-growth annealing totaling 22 h duration at 500 °C in 10$^5$ Pa of flowing oxygen was performed on the capacitive structures fabricated with the first procedure.

2.3. Structural and dielectric investigation of the capacitive structures

LaYbO$_3$ has an orthorhombic crystal structure. In powder diffraction studies, LaYbO$_3$ was described by the space group $Pnma$ with $a=6.033$ Å, $b=8.432$ Å and $c=5.843$ Å [4]. In this paper it is described by space group $Pbnm$ with lattice parameters of $a=5.843$ Å, $b=6.033$ Å and $c=8.432$ Å. This choice of space group is consistent with the work of Schubert et al. on LaLuO$_3$ thin films prepared on SrRuO$_3$/SrTiO$_3$ [5]. It is also consistent with a convention for perovskite thin films where the longest axis is denoted the $c$-axis and is often desired to be parallel to the substrate normal. The matrix for converting Miller indices from the pseudo-cubic space group Pm-3m to the orthorhombic Pbnm space group is given by Eq. (1):

$$\begin{bmatrix} h \\ k \\ l \end{bmatrix}_o = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & -1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 2 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} h \\ \omega \\ \gamma \end{bmatrix}_c$$

When indexing planes in this paper, the subscript “$c$” is to denote cubic symmetry and the subscript “$o$” is used for the orthorhombic symmetry.

High-resolution X-ray diffraction was performed using a Panalytical X'Pert Pro diffractometer equipped with a hybrid Ge monochromator giving CuK$_\alpha_1$ radiation. Substrates were mounted on a glass slide with the film layer facing upwards and the diffractometer was aligned to the (001)$_c$ peak of the substrate. SrTiO$_3$ has a simple cubic perovskite structure with lattice constant of 3.905 Å [9]. Two types of scan were performed. The first was a 2$\theta$–$\omega$ scan through the substrate (001)$_c$ planes in order to collect all the film peaks corresponding to planes parallel to the substrate (001)$_c$ planes. The second was a scan of the section of reciprocal space around the (001)$_c$, SrTiO$_3$ peak, in order to collect the corresponding (002)$_c$, LaYbO$_3$ and the (001)$_c$, SrRuO$_3$ peaks from the thin layers. SrRuO$_3$ is often considered as a pseudocubic perovskite with lattice constant of 3.93 Å when grown on SrTiO$_3$ [10] so its diffraction peaks are labeled with the subscript “$c$” like those of the substrate.

Impedance measurements of the fabricated structures were performed using an Agilent 4294A precision impedance analyzer with a source voltage amplitude of 1 V over the frequency range of 50 Hz–50 kHz.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. X-ray diffraction analysis

All of the results presented in this Section 3.1 correspond to films grown using the first fabrication procedure (i.e. with the ex-situ patterning of the SrRuO$_3$ bottom electrode layer).

Fig. 2 shows the results of 2$\theta$–$\omega$ scans performed on two SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ capacitive structures. Fig. 2a shows the 2$\theta$–$\omega$ scan of an as-grown sample which did not undergo the post-growth annealing treatment. Fig. 2b shows the 2$\theta$–$\omega$ scan of a similar sample after 22 h post-growth annealing. The peaks with their labels together with the assigned reflections are summarized in Table 1. The peaks labeled...
with the letters A–I are present in both the annealed and in the 
as-grown sample. Of the peaks labeled with the numbers, peaks 1 
and 6 are only present in the as-grown sample. Peaks arising from 
the SrTiO$_3$ [001]$_c$ and LaYbO$_3$ [001]$_o$ planes are visible in both 
scans.

The labels B and E mark the [001]$_c$ and the [002]$_c$ planes respec-


tively of SrTiO$_3$ and SrRuO$_3$. In the as-grown sample both the 
SrTiO$_3$ and SrRuO$_3$ peaks are visible at B and E. In the annealed sample there are 
single peaks at B and E, in other words the SrRuO$_3$ peaks are too close 
with these orientations become reoriented during annealing. In LaLuO$_3$ 
the basal-plane diagonal is almost equal to the c-axis 


To originate from recrystallization of the SrRuO$_3$ at the edges of the 
electrode during the heating of the sample for the deposition of the 
subsequent LaYbO$_3$ and SrRuO$_3$ layers. The higher intensity or nar-
rowing of film peaks A, C, D, F and H after the post-growth annealing, 
as shown in Fig. 2b, is consistent with further changes in crystal struc-

Peaks 1–6 in Table 1 originate from LaYbO$_3$ planes which do not be-
long to the [001]$_o$ family. Their relative intensities are also consistent 
with the measurements performed on the LaYbO$_3$ target [4]. These 
peaks arise from misaligned regions present in the LaYbO$_3$ film and 
are more prevalent in the as-grown sample (Fig. 2a). The presence of 
these regions might be due to a different orientation of the LaYbO$_3$ on 
these regions. Peak F is the (006)$_o$ LaYbO$_3$ reflection and may in-


Peaks A, D and H correspond to the [002]$_o$, [004]$_o$ and [008]$_o$ 
LaYbO$_3$ reflections. Peak F is the [006]$_o$ LaYbO$_3$ reflection and may in-
clude a contribution from the (220)$_o$ SrRuO$_3$ reflection. The relative 
iintensities of the LaYbO$_3$ film peaks are consistent with the intensities 
of the same reflections measured on bulk LaYbO$_3$ [4].

In well aligned growth the 29–ω scans should consist of only 
peaks corresponding to both the cubic and orthorhombic (001) planes 
oriented parallel to the substrate surface, however peaks C and F origin-
ating from the (110)$_c$ and possibly the (220)$_c$ SrRuO$_3$ planes appear 
in the scans of both the annealed and the as-grown samples.

From the data it appears that during the patterning of the SrRuO$_3$ 
bottom electrode, the edges of the electrode area may have been 
damaged by the argon ion milling necessary to define the electrode 
geometry. The (110)$_c$ and (220)$_c$ peaks (peaks C and F) are believed 
to originate from recrystallization of the SrRuO$_3$ at the edges of the 
electrode during the heating of the sample for the deposition of the 
subsequent LaYbO$_3$ and SrRuO$_3$ layers. The higher intensity or nar-
rowing of film peaks A, C, D, F and H after the post-growth annealing, 
as shown in Fig. 2b, is consistent with further changes in crystal struc-

During the post-growth annealing, recrystallization also takes place 
in the LaYbO$_3$. After annealing, the (044)$_o$ and (404)$_o$ peaks (1 and 6 
in Table 1) are not seen (Fig. 2b), indicating that regions of the film 
with these orientations become reoriented during annealing. In LaRuO$_3$ 
films, [001]$_o$-oriented domains were seen to become dominant over 
[h0l]$_o$-oriented domains [5]; this was understood from the recogni-
tion that in LaRuO$_3$ the basal-plane diagonal is almost equal to the c-axis 
lattice parameter. In LaYbO$_3$, the lattice parameters corresponding to 
the (044)$_o$ and (404)$_o$ peaks are close to 1/7th of the c-axis lattice pa-
rameter, suggesting that these planes can easily reorient themselves. 
In contrast, recrystallisation did not lead to disappearance of peaks 2, 
3, 4 and 5 in the LaYbO$_3$ films considered here, which may be a result 
of the fact that these do not display a close match to the c-axis lattice 
parameter.

After annealing, three extra peaks labeled L, M and N in Fig. 2(b) 
appeared which further substantiate the analysis. The peaks M and N are 
particularly broad. Since the assignments for all three cannot be 
made without ambiguity they are not included in Table 1. Peaks L and 
N may be associated with recrystallized SrRuO$_3$ that is not epitaxial 
with the substrate; peak N with a (100)$_o$ or (001)$_o$ reflection and


![Image](66x342 to 270x741)

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peak label</th>
<th>d spacing [Å]</th>
<th>2θ [degree]</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GV01D</td>
<td>GV02D</td>
<td>GV01D</td>
<td>GV02D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5.5604</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5.4488</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.1917</td>
<td>4.2189</td>
<td>21.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.905</td>
<td>3.905</td>
<td>22.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0127</td>
<td>3.0127</td>
<td>29.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9683</td>
<td>2.9759</td>
<td>30.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.7203</td>
<td>2.8037</td>
<td>32.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4481</td>
<td>2.4405</td>
<td>36.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3380</td>
<td>2.3369</td>
<td>38.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2.098</td>
<td>2.1099</td>
<td>43.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>1.9526</td>
<td>1.9526</td>
<td>46.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.3983</td>
<td>1.4034</td>
<td>66.851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>1.3016</td>
<td>1.3016</td>
<td>72.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2245</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>77.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.200</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>79.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>1.0496</td>
<td>1.0548</td>
<td>94.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>0.9760</td>
<td>0.97631</td>
<td>104.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.93469</td>
<td>110.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Fig. 2. a) 2θ–ω scan of a SrRuO$_3$ (100 nm)/LaYbO$_3$ (300 nm)/SrRuO$_3$ (150 nm) capacitive structure grown on an [001]$_c$ SrTiO$_3$ substrate. This sample was not annealed. b) 2θ–ω scan of a SrRuO$_3$ (100 nm)/LaYbO$_3$ (300 nm)/SrRuO$_3$ (150 nm) capacitive structure grown on an [001]$_c$ SrTiO$_3$ substrate. This sample underwent the 22 hour post-growth annealing at 500 °C in 10$^5$ Pa of oxygen.](66x342 to 270x741)
peak L with the (164)o or (600)o reflection. Peak M may be associated with a strain-induced phase transition producing a 1/2(120)o LaYbO3 reflection.

The orientation of the SrRuO3/LaYbO3/SrRuO3 trilayers was studied with the help of reciprocal space maps. Fig. 3 shows a reciprocal space map of the region around the SrTiO3 (001)c peak for the as-grown sample (this is the same sample whose 2θ−ω scan is reported in Fig. 2a). The most intense peak corresponds to the (001)c planes of the SrTiO3 substrate. The broad peak at the bottom of the scan corresponds to the LaYbO3 (002)o planes. The breadth of the peak indicates that, across the extent of the film, there is a significant mosaic spread in the LaYbO3 layer. The center of this broad peak appears to be at the same position on the Qx-axis as the SrTiO3 peak, indicating that the LaYbO3 (002)o planes are aligned with the (001)c planes of the substrate.

The data in Fig. 4 represent the reciprocal space map of a SrRuO3/LaYbO3/SrRuO3 trilayer after the post-growth annealing treatment (this is the same sample whose 2θ−ω scan is reported in Fig. 2b). The LaYbO3 (002)o peak, while still broad, is significantly less broad than in Fig. 3, showing that the annealing procedure has reduced the mosaic spread. To the right of the substrate peak there is a strong SrRuO3 (001)c peak which shows that this SrRuO3 is relaxed and slightly mis-aligned with respect to the substrate. To the right of this peak is a trail of intensity, indicating a population of SrRuO3 which is less well aligned, possibly arising from the recrystallization which takes place at the edges of the bottom electrode geometry.

It can be concluded that the post-growth annealing re-crystallizes some mis-oriented regions in the LaYbO3 film and repairs damage to the bottom electrode caused by the ion-milling necessary to define its geometry.
3.2. Impedance measurements

Impedance measurements of the SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ trilayers showed that when the LaYbO$_3$ was grown in flowing oxygen at a pressure of 40 Pa the capacitive structures presented resistive losses. This can be seen from the phase angle of the impedance in Fig. 5a. The phase angle is close to zero at low frequency, indicating conducting behavior, and becomes more negative as the frequency increases, indicating lossy capacitive behavior at high frequencies. Near-ideal capacitive behavior was found for LaYbO$_3$ films grown in oxygen at a pressure of 0.40 Pa, as shown by the phase angle of $-90^\circ$ in Fig. 5b. The data shown in Fig. 5 correspond to capacitors prepared by the first method although the better properties for lower pressure deposition were found in both preparation methods.

A similar decrease in dielectric losses with decreased deposition pressure was reported for SrRuO$_3$/BaTiO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ capacitive structures also grown by PLD [8]. During PLD, depending on the surface mobility of the adatoms, the growth of the film may be accompanied by the formation of stacking faults and amorphous and void-like grain boundaries [12]. The surface mobility of the adatoms is influenced by the deposition pressure, the substrate temperature and the laser energy. High deposition pressures imply a large number of collisions in the path between the target and the substrate. The kinetic energy lost in the path produces a lower mobility of the atomic species on the substrate [13].

Impedance measurements on SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ capacitors allow the calculation of the permittivity of the LaYbO$_3$ by using the expression for the impedance of the capacitor [14]:

$$ z(j\omega) = \frac{1}{j\omega C} $$

(2)

In Eq. (2), $\omega$ is the angular frequency, $C$ is the capacitance and $j$ is the imaginary number.
LaYbO$_3$ was grown in the lower oxygen pressure of 0.40 Pa. The critical ing performed after deposition of the tri-layer). In both cases the other built with the second fabrication process (i.e. all the pattern-
the bottom electrode before completion of the tri-layer sequence) and
one built with the
first fabrication process (i.e. with the patterning of the bottom electrode before completion of the tri-layer sequence) and
the other built with the second fabrication process (i.e. all the pattern-
ning performed after deposition of the tri-layer). In both cases the LaYbO$_3$ was grown in the lower oxygen pressure of 0.40 Pa. The critical difference between the two samples is the presence of damage on the bottom electrode due to patterning in the sample grown by the first method.

The open circles (○) in Fig. 6a represent the relative permittivity of the LaYbO$_3$ layer belonging to a capacitive structure fabricated with the first process. The measured value is approximately twice the value measured in bulk material. An enhanced permittivity was also found in YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$/SrTiO$_3$/YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$ capacitive structures grown by PLD in which the YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$ bottom electrode was patterned by standard photolithography and argon ion-beam milling [15]. This behavior was attributed to the presence of defects and to the island growth of the LaYbO$_3$ layer belonging to a capacitive structure fabricated with the two-step method. As already discussed in Section 3.1 the edges of the SrRuO$_3$ bottom electrode of the sample fabricated by the first procedure are expected to be damaged by argon ion bombardment. The damaged areas do not constitute a good seed layer for the growth of the LaYbO$_3$. These regions might not have the right stoichiometry or may present a higher density of defects and stacking faults, leading to space charge polarization in the LaYbO$_3$ film and an increased permittivity. After 8 h of annealing the relative permittivity at room temperature was reduced to 44 as shown in Fig. 6a and in Fig. 6b. After 22 h of annealing its value was around 31 as shown in Fig. 6a and 6b. The reduction in relative permittivity is most likely connected to the improvement in crystallinity discussed in Section 3.1. Changes in strain, both homogeneous and heterogeneous, have been shown to influence dielectric properties significantly [16].

When the samples were grown by the second method, in one step and completely in-situ, the relative permittivity of the LaYbO$_3$ film was 36, as shown by the solid line in Fig. 6a, about 35% higher than that measured in bulk material.

Both preparation routes yielded values of relative permittivity higher than the relative permittivity of the bulk material. These higher values might be attributed to a higher permittivity along the LaYbO$_3$ (001)$_{\text{a}}$ axis as Schubert et al. [5] suggested in the case of LaLuO$_3$ films.

4. Conclusions

The crystal structures and the dielectric properties of SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ capacitive structures were investigated and assessed. When the capacitive structures were fabricated with the patterning of the bottom electrode layer before deposition of the LaYbO$_3$ film, mis-oriented regions were present in the LaYbO$_3$ film and the relative permittivity was twice that of bulk LaYbO$_3$. The high value is attributed to the presence of defects between the edge of the bottom electrode and the LaYbO$_3$ film which leads to a space charge polarization in the LaYbO$_3$ layer [5,15].

Post-growth annealing recrystallized the damaged regions in the SrRuO$_3$ and the LaYbO$_3$ and the permittivity was lowered towards the bulk value. When the SrRuO$_3$/LaYbO$_3$/SrRuO$_3$ stack was grown in one step, the relative permittivity of the LaYbO$_3$ was comparable with that of the annealed film grown by the two-step method. In both cases the values of the relative permittivity were still higher than that of bulk LaYbO$_3$. This is attributed to anisotropy of the relative permittivity, with the highest values along the (001) axis [5].

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