

## **Low-Voltage TEM to explore physics and chemistry of low-dimensional and low-atomic number materials on the atomic scale**

**Ute A. Kaiser**

Central Facility of Electron Microscopy, Electron Microscopy of Materials Science, Ulm University,  
Ulm, Germany

ute.kaiser@uni-ulm.de

Recent technical advances in transmission electron microscopy (TEM) [1,2] created clear trends towards lower accelerating voltages such as 80kV or 60kV. This enabled for the first time atomically-resolved structure analysis of materials of low-dimensions and/or low atomic number. At higher voltages, the low intrinsic contrast and the high susceptibility of these materials to electron-beam induced knock-on damage prevented defect analysis of materials such as graphene, carbon nanotubes, and fullerenes. Basic questions in physics and chemistry about the exact atomic structure of defects, about their dynamical behaviour or about the atomic structure of amorphous materials, microscopist now begin to answer in direct space on the atom-by-atom level [3-9]. Also the theoretical result that it is the tolerable electron dose that limits the achievable specimen resolution in high-resolution TEM images [10] is now exemplified: Microscopists now can use an electron beam with different energies and doses to probe in graphene structural rearrangements of defects and grain boundaries and determine knock-on thresholds from atomically resolved image sequences on the quantitative level [11]. This means we now begin to understand the difficult process of the collision process between the beam electrons and the target atoms, first for selected materials such as C<sup>12</sup> and C<sup>13</sup> graphene layers [11]. We visualize bonding effects in high-resolution TEM images of covalently bonded light elements (B, C, N) [12]. Moreover, we use graphene and carbon nanotubes as substrates for radiation-sensitive compounds and take advantage of the dynamics of atom knock-on processes under the electron beam to understand fundamental new transformation routes between carbon nanostructures atom-by-atom [13-15]. Further, graphene can now serve as an extreme thermal platform for physisorbed carbon species whose transformations can be imaged under the influence of Joule heat and electron irradiation atom-by atom [16] or simply serves as a substrate for biological structures [17].

Recently, microscope developments are addressing electron energies down to 30keV [18] or 20keV [19] because many low-Z materials require imaging at energies appreciably lower than 60keV. We demonstrate, moreover, by means of image calculations [20,21] that at 20kV the contrast, even for graphene, a one-carbon-atom-thin material, cannot be described by means of the weak phase-object approximation, and that correction of chromatic aberration is a prerequisite for obtaining high-resolution, high-contrast zero-loss and energy-filtered inelastic images [22]. In EELS mode we take advantage of the exceptionally low background noise at low voltages enabling the investigation of plasmons in single [23] and multi-layer graphene using angle-resolved EELS.

We outline the fully-corrected transmission electron microscope for spatial imaging, diffraction and spectroscopy using low-energy electrons optimised for the range between 20 and 80keV.

## References

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