

MASTER'S THESIS

Laser ablation of aqueous samples at 193-nm: mechanism and applications

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Laser Ablation of Aqueous Samples
at 193-nm:
Mechanism and Applications

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ABSTRACT

In the laser ablation of aqueous samples, earlier studies showed that the plasmas induced by ArF laser were cooler than that generated in conventional laser-induced breakdown, while the electron density was comparable. As a result, the signal-to-background ratio of the analyte line emissions was thousands of times better, making 193-nm ablation an extremely sensitive analytical technique. To further that work, the present thesis addressed two outstanding issues. First, at the low plasma temperature when thermal ionization might not be extensive, the mechanism of free electron production in ArF laser ablation remained puzzling. We found that 193-nm photoionization of vibrationally excited water molecules was a probable channel. Second, for several elements including sodium and potassium, the ArF laser probe gave excellent *mass* detection limits when sub-breakdown laser fluence was used for microanalysis. For trace analysis, higher laser fluences would be required to ablate enough sample material to yield a detectable number of analyte atoms in the probed volume. We showed that ArF laser ablation still gave record-low *relative* detection limits in this high fluence regime.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Motivation	7
1.3 Scope of Study.....	8
Chapter 2. Photoionization of water vapor at 193-nm	10
2.1 Theory.....	10
2.1.1 Properties of Water Molecules.....	10
2.1.2 Resonance photoionization of H ₂ O.....	12
2.1.3 Kinetic model for 193-nm photoionization of H ₂ O.....	14
2.2 Photoionization experiments	18
2.2.1 Experimental setup	18
2.2.1.1 Laser Source	18
2.2.1.2 Sample Cell.....	19
2.2.1.3 Heat Source.....	20
2.2.1.4 Signal Collection.....	20
2.2.2 Experimental Parameters.....	21
2.3 Results and Discussions.....	22
2.4 Conclusion.....	28
Chapter 3. Multi-element trace analysis of aqueous samples by 193-nm ablation	29
3.1 Principles.....	29
3.1.1 Inductively-coupled plasma atomic emission spectrometry (ICP-AES).....	29
3.1.2 Laser energy dependence.....	30
3.1.3 Sensitivity and Limit of Detection.....	33
3.1.4 Spectral signal-to-noise ratio (S/N).....	34
3.1.5 Plasma Diagnostics.....	35
3.1.5.1 Electron density measurement.....	35
3.1.5.2 Electron temperature measurement.....	37
3.2 Experimental aspects.....	38
3.2.1 Sample preparation	38
3.2.1.1 Absorbant solution.....	38
3.2.1.2 Analyte solution.....	39
3.2.2 Experimental Setup	39
3.2.2.1 Flow Cell.....	39
3.2.2.2 Laser Ablation Setup.....	40
3.2.2.3 Procedures, Conditions and Parameters.....	42
3.3 Results and Discussion	42
3.3.1 Laser fluence effect.....	42
3.3.2 Time-resolved spectra.....	44

	3.3.3 Electron density and plasma temperature.....	47
	3.3.4 Analysis of sodium, calcium, barium and lead.....	49
3.4	Conclusion.....	56
Chapter 4.	Summary.....	58
4.1	1 +1 photoionization of water vapor at 193 nm.....	58
4.2	Trace Analysis in aqueous solution.....	59
	REFERENCE.....	61
	APPENDIX A. Calculation of signal-to-noise ratio by using IS5 programming.....	63
	APPENDIX B. Choice of Blank Solution.....	65
	APPENDIX C. Detection Limit for Ba, Ca and Pb.....	66
	PRESENTATION & PUBLICATIONS.....	71
	CURRICULUM VITAE.....	72