Three-dimensional measurement of tip shape geometry with SEM

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Submitted as poster presentation, IM 7 (3D and analysis of big data)

For traceable measurements of complex structures, the characterisation of the applied tactile tips is required. Especially advanced measurement tasks, i.e. the recording of the geometry of silicon nanopillars with high aspect ratio, presumes knowledge about the three-dimensional shape. The complete coverage of the tip shape in a 3D measurement data set enables the extraction of 2D profiles in different spatial directions. These profiles can be used for the deconvolution of the data, which were measured with the applied tip.

For the characterization of the tip shape, a fast and reliable high-resolution measurement technique is required. SEM imaging fulfils these preconditions very well, but requires some extensions, if height measurements are required. Therefore, we applied a high-resolution SEM (Thermo Fisher Verios G4), which is equipped with a retractable four quadrant (4Q) BSE detector (PNDetector) and an active scanning system for topographic measurements (point electronic).

The applied topographic measurement system utilizes the segmented BSE detector, which is inserted below the SEM pole piece. Surface height, e.g. topography, is obtained with a shape-from-shading algorithm that uses the subtle differences in simultaneous BSE signals, as described by the known angular distribution of backscattered electrons. This approach needs no sample tilting and is very computationally efficient and thus allows for live *in situ* topographic view of the investigated sample. A dedicated calibration standard has been used for this study to ensure height accuracy.

The results show the 3D reconstructed shape of a tactile tip (fig. 1). To avoid scaling errors, the height of the tip was also measured with the 90-degree tilted sample and afterward used for the determination of the correct height scale. As a result, the measurement data of the tip shape were used to extract 2D profiles which are ready for the deconvolution of the tactile measurements.

In summary, the application of topographic SEM measurements is a fast and reliable high-resolution method to determine the shape of tactile tips. Special attention is to pay on the system setup, BSE detector adjustment and the geometric calibration of the scanning system. If these requirements are fulfilled, the quantitative measurement of the tip shape, and derived measures, like profiles, tip angle and diameter is possible in an easy way. In addition, the results show the potential of this method for further applications, i.e. the precise measurement of indenter tips (see fig.2).

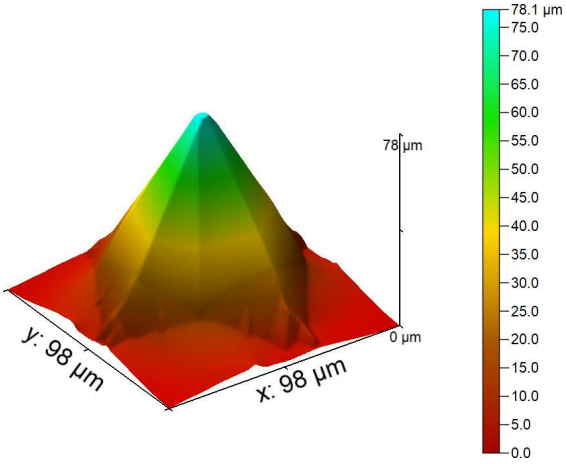

Fig. 1: 3D Reconstruction of a silicon microprobe tip.

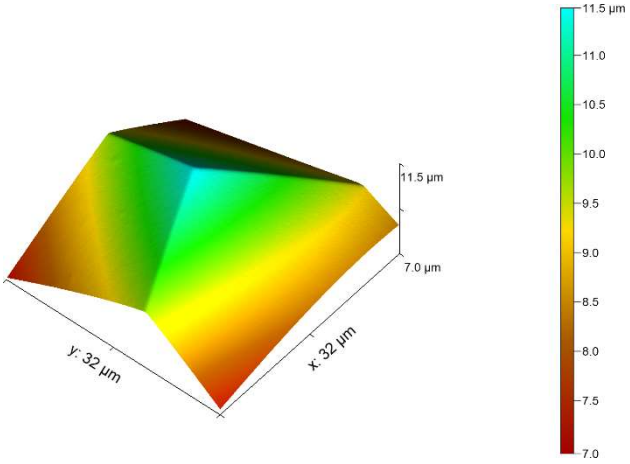

Fig. 2: 3D Reconstruction of a Berkovich indenter tip.