

**Precursor influence on the electrical properties of textured Bi-2212
superconductors**

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Title running head: Precursor influence on Bi-2212 LFZ textured
superconductors

Abstract

Several synthetic methods, solid state, sol-gel and polymer solution method, have been used to prepare prereacted precursors, as well as a vitreous material obtained by melt-quenching. The influence of the starting powder characteristics on the phase formation, microstructure, T_c and J_c of Bi-2212 textured rods prepared by directional crystallization from the melt has been analysed. In all the cases, high transport critical current values (higher than 3000 A/cm^2 at 77K) have been obtained, independently of the precursor type. Samples obtained by the polymer route show improved T_c values, associated to a lower oxygen content.

Keywords: Bi-2212, Resistivity, Critical current, Synthesis, Directional growth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fabrication of bulk high- T_c superconducting ceramics with well oriented microstructure and being able of carrying high currents below 77K, is of great interest for the development of practical devices [1]. $\text{Bi}_2\text{Sr}_2\text{CaCu}_2\text{O}_{8+\delta}$ (Bi-2212) superconductors have demonstrated that they are suitable for many applications when they are properly processed in order to obtain a good grain alignment [2, 3]. Among other techniques which produce well textured materials [4-6], the directional grown from the melt, as the Laser Floating Zone (LFZ) method, has demonstrated to be a useful technique for rapidly growing well textured BSCCO rods [7-9]. As it was reported in previous works [10], the microstructure of the superconducting materials is characterized by a good alignment of the grains, with their a - b planes quasi-parallel to the growth direction. This high degree of texture leads to a very important increase of the transport properties, J_c , due to the reduction of the number of low-angle junctions [11].

Although in previous works the characteristics of the starting powder have been observed to play an important role towards superconductor phase formation and microstructure development in Pb-substituted, Bi-2223 bulk sintered and textured ceramics [12-14], a similar study has not been performed with Bi-2212 textured ceramics. Furthermore, it is very important to acquire an improved understanding of all the parameters (phase content, morphology and homogeneity of the starting powders) that could affect the solidification process and, as a consequence, phase formation and microstructure of LFZ Bi-2212 processed samples. The control of these parameters would lead to the

1 production of textured superconducting ceramics with high J_c values together
2 with a high degree of reproducibility.
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4 On the other hand, considering industrial production, it is necessary to have into
5 account the above parameters in order to modify the existing synthetic
6 methods, or designing new ones, which lead to a reduction on the processing
7 time of precursors and/or an improvement in the final properties, compared with
8 the classical solid state method. Some methods have already shown their
9 potential in the reduction of the processing time and/or the improvement of the
10 transport properties on bulk sintered Bi-2212 and Bi(Pb)-2223 ceramics [15-17].
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12 The aim of this work is developing reproducible precursor powder preparation
13 methods that yield optimum quality $\text{Bi}_2\text{Sr}_2\text{CaCu}_2\text{O}_x$ textured materials, using the
14 LFZ technique. It is presented a comparison of directionally grown materials
15 from precursors obtained by four different preparation methods, the
16 conventional solid-state synthesis, a sol-gel method, a versatile polymer
17 solution synthesis route developed in our laboratory, and a melt-quenching
18 process.
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20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 **2. EXPERIMENTAL**

42 The initial $\text{Bi}_2\text{Sr}_2\text{CaCu}_2\text{O}_x$ materials, used in this work, were prepared by the
43 following methods:
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45 (i) *Solid-state reaction*: Bi_2O_3 (98%, Panreac), SrCO_3 (98 + %, Panreac), CaCO_3
46 (98.5%, Panreac), and CuO (98%, Panreac), were attritor-milled using zirconia
47 balls and absolute ethanol for 1.5 h at 600 rpm. The resulting suspension was
48 dried using IR radiation and subsequently placed in an oven at 200 °C for 24 h
49 in order to evaporate the maximum amount of ethanol. The resulting mixture
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1 was placed in a furnace and heated slowly to 750 °C, where it was kept for ca.
2 12 h, followed by furnace cooling. After cooling, the remaining powder was
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4 manually ground and heated again at 800 °C for 12 h, milled and isostatically
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6 pressed at c.a. 200 MPa in form of cylinders (2-3 mm diameter and 120 mm
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8 long).
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11 (ii) *Sol-gel*: $\text{Bi}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (≥ 98 %, Aldrich), SrCO_3 (98 + %, Panreac), CaCO_3
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13 (98.5 %, Panreac), CuO (98 %, Panreac), were suspended in distilled water.
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15 Concentrated HNO_3 (analysis grade, Panreac) was added dropwise into the
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17 suspension until it turned into a clear blue solution. Citric acid (99.5 %,
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19 Panreac), and ethylene glycol (99 %, Panreac), were added to this solution in
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21 the adequate proportions. Evaporation of the solvent was performed slowly in
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23 order to decompose the nitric acid excess, which allows the polymerization
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25 reaction between ethylene glycol and citric acid, forming a blue gel. The dried
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27 product was then decomposed (slow self combustion) by heating at 350 °C for 1
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29 h. The decomposed solid was mechanically ground and calcined at 750 and
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31 800 °C for 12 h, with an intermediate grinding. Cylindrical precursors were
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33 prepared from these powders by isostatical pressing at about 200 MPa for 1
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35 minute.
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39 (iii) *Polymer solution synthesis*: To a suspension of $\text{Bi}(\text{CH}_3\text{CO}_2)_2$ (≥ 99.99 %, Aldrich),
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41 $\text{Sr}(\text{CH}_3\text{CO}_2) \cdot 0.5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (99 %, Panreac), $\text{Ca}(\text{CH}_3\text{CO}_2) \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (98 %, Alfa Aesar),
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43 and $\text{Cu}(\text{CH}_3\text{CO}_2)_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ (98 %, Panreac) in distilled H_2O , glacial acetic acid (ACS Reagent, Panreac)
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45 was added until a light blue clear solution was formed. Polyethylenimine (PEI) (50% aqueous, Aldrich) was then added to
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47 the above solution, which turned darker immediately due to the nitrogen-metal
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49 coordination. After partial evaporation (~80 vol. %) of water and acetic acid in a
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1 rotary evaporator, the concentrated solution was placed on a hot plate at 50 °C
2 until a very dark pink thermoplastic paste appeared. Further heating produced a
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4 slow combustion with the release of brown fumes (nitrogen oxides). The
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6 resulting powder was manually milled and calcined at 750 and 800 °C for ca. 12
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8 h, with an intermediate milling, and isostatically pressed at 200 MPa in form of
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10 cylindrical bars.
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13 (iv) *Melt quenching*: Bi₂O₃ (98 %, Panreac), SrCO₃ (98 + %, Panreac), CaCO₃
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15 (98.5 %, Panreac), and CuO (98 %, Panreac), were ball-milled for 30 minutes at
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17 300 rpm and thermally treated at 750 and 800 °C for 12h, with an intermediate
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19 milling, in order to decompose the carbonates before the melting process. The
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21 powder was then placed into a platinum crucible and heated at 1050 °C for at
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23 least 1 h in order to homogeneize the melt. The liquid was then introduced in a
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25 quartz tube (2 mm internal diameter and 250 mm length) using a vacuum pump
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27 (see Fig. 1), producing a rapid solidification inside the tube which leads to the
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29 formation of vitreous cylindrical precursors, as shown in Fig. 2.
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39 The cylinders obtained by the different methods were used as feed in a
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41 directional solidification process performed in an LFZ installation [14]. The
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43 textured bars were obtained using a continuous power Nd:YAG laser ($\lambda = 1064$
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45 nm), under air, at a growth rate of 30 mm h⁻¹ and a relative rotation of 18 rpm
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47 between seed and feed. Using these growth conditions and adjusting the laser
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49 power input to obtain a melted zone of 1-1.5 times the rod diameter, it is
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51 possible to obtain stable solidification front, which allows the fabrication of
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53 homogeneous textured bars.
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1 Bi-2212 ceramic presents incongruent melting and, in consequence, after the
2 directional solidification process, it is necessary to perform a thermal treatment
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4 in order to form the Bi-2212 superconducting phase [18, 19]. This annealing
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6 process was performed under air, and consisted in two steps: 60 h at 860 °C,
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8 followed by 12 h at 800 °C and, finally, quenched in air to room temperature.
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10 Before the thermal treatment, silver contacts were painted on the as-grown
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12 samples for the electrical measurements. After annealing, the silver contacts
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14 have typical resistance values below 1 $\mu\Omega$.
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19 Granulometry (CILAS 850 Alcatel Granulometer) measurements were
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21 performed throughout the synthetic procedure, using the same conditions for all
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23 the samples, to characterize the intermediate products. Samples for
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25 granulometric measurements have been prepared by ultrasonic mixing in
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27 acetone to insure the breaking of the agglomerates, avoiding their influence on
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29 the mean grain size.
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34 Structural identification of all ceramic samples was performed by powder XRD
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36 utilizing a Rigaku D/max-B X-ray powder diffractometer (CuK α radiation) with 2θ
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38 ranging between 10 and 60 degrees. Microstructural characterization was
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40 performed on polished longitudinal cross-sections of the samples, in a scanning
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42 electron microscope (SEM, JEOL JSM 6400) equipped with an energy
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44 dispersive spectroscopy (EDX) system.
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49 After annealing, the proportion of the different phases has been estimated from
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51 several SEM micrographs using Digital Micrograph software. Annealed samples
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53 used for electrical characterization were, approximately, 4 cm long and were
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55 measured using the standard four-probe configuration. Critical current density
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57 (J_c) values were determined at 77K using the 1 $\mu\text{V}/\text{cm}$ criterion. Resistivity as a
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1 function of temperature, from 77 to 300K, was measured using a dc current of 1
2 mA, in order to determine the transport T_c values.
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4 Moreover, J_c determination at temperatures below 77K has been performed by
5 pumping liquid nitrogen in an experimental device described elsewhere [20].
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7 In this work, the results obtained on LFZ textured samples derived from
8 precursors synthesized by four different methods are presented. Precursors S1
9 are prepared by Solid State reaction, S2 by Sol-Gel, S3 by Polymer Solution,
10 and S4 by Melt-Quenching.
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22 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSION**

23 **3.1. Precursors characterization**

24 Fig. 3 shows the grain size evolution versus thermal treatment time for the solid
25 state, sol-gel and polymer solution synthetic procedures. For all of them, the
26 starting materials have, approximately, the same grain size before calcination. It
27 can also be clearly seen that the grain growth rate is much higher in the
28 polymer solution method than for the other two synthetic methods, which is in
29 agreement with previous studies [21].
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41 A summary of phase analysis results from powder XRD is given in Table I. The
42 final products, with the same nominal composition $\text{Bi}_2\text{Sr}_2\text{CaCu}_2\text{O}_8$, are
43 composed, mainly, by the Bi-2212 phase, accompanied by other minor
44 secondary phases, as Bi-2201 and CaCuO_2 , CaCu_2O_3 , or Ca_2CuO_3 . As
45 expected, XRD studies revealed that sample S1 was a mixture of all the starting
46 oxides and carbonates before calcination. After calcination at 750 °C for 12 h,
47 carbonates had partially decomposed and reacted to form the 2201 phase and
48 after the second calcination step, the Bi-2212 is the major one, coexisting with
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some secondary phases such as Bi-2201, CaCuO₂, and CuO. In sample S2, Bi-2212, Bi-2201, and Ca₂CuO₃ have been clearly identified after the thermal treatments, while almost pure 2212 phase was found in sample S3. For samples S4, the analysis showed that an amorphous material was formed and, as a consequence, no phase could be identified.

The morphologies of the starting powders, after the annealing processes, have been observed by SEM. Representative micrographs for the final precursors S1, S2, and S3, are shown in Fig. 4. It was found that S1 and S2 (Figs. 4a and 4b) powders are inhomogeneous regarding the grain sizes, they are formed by agglomerates composed, in turn, of very small grains together with big grains. On the other hand, S3 powders have bigger mean size, less agglomerates, and lower grain size dispersion (see Fig. 4c) than S1 and S2.

Finally, the aspect of the fractured final cylinders, obtained by the S4 route, is illustrated with Fig. 5. In the micrograph it is clear that the rupture is that corresponding to a fragile material where it is possible to distinguish the three typical regions (mirror, mist and hackle) [22]. Higher magnification image represented as an insert shows no evidence of grains, confirming the amorphous nature of the precursor observed in the XRD data.

3.2. Textured materials characterization

The main superconducting and nonsuperconducting phases developed during the LFZ processing of the four different BSCCO precursors just discussed above, have been identified by powder XRD diffraction. The phases found in the different as-grown samples are the same, independently of the precursor, and associated to Bi-2201 and (Ca_{1-x}Sr_x)CuO₂. This result is in agreement with the

1 fact that Bi-2212 melts incongruently and the solidification process produces
2 several secondary phases. On the other hand, the large and very stable thermal
3 gradient found in the liquid-solid interphase, produced by the laser radiation,
4 allows obtaining well textured and homogeneous samples.
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9 SEM microstructural observations on as-grown materials showed that all the
10 textured rods possess similar phase distribution and morphology. This
11 characteristic is indicating that the melt is chemically similar in all cases,
12 probably as a consequence of the homogenization produced in the melt. A
13 representative micrograph performed on a longitudinal polished section of the
14 as-grown material obtained from the S1 precursor is displayed in Fig. 6, where
15 three different phases can be identified. The primary solidification phase is the
16 Bi-free $(\text{Ca}_{1-x}\text{Sr}_x)\text{CuO}_2$ (dark contrast in the micrographs identified by EDX),
17 independently of the precursor used. This phase appears well aligned with the
18 rod axis, as expected from the flat solidification interface observed in the growth
19 process [23]. Major phase is the light grey one which shows a composition
20 close to the ideal Bi-2201 stoichiometry. This phase's formation is promoted by
21 its fast solidification kinetics from the Bi-enriched liquid, a process which follows
22 initial nucleation of $(\text{Ca}_{1-x}\text{Sr}_x)\text{CuO}_2$. Moreover, from the trends observed in Fig. 6
23 it can be deduced that the grain growth of this Bi-rich phase follows the
24 alignment of the primary solidified phase. Small black spots distributed inside
25 the Bi-rich phase have been identified as CaO particles.
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50 During the two-steps annealing of the as-grown materials, the above phases
51 react between them and almost disappeared, leading to nearly Bi-2212 single
52 phase textured rods. In the first annealing process, the Bi-2212 formation is
53 produced, following the equilibrium equation:
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3 while the second step is designed to adjust the oxygen content in the Bi-2212
4 phase.
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8 Powder XRD performed on annealed samples showed that Bi-2212 is the major
9 phase, with only small amounts of Bi-2201, in all cases. This is illustrated in Fig.
10 7, where the XRD plot of the S2 sample is represented. Unmarked peaks
11 correspond to the 2212 phase, while the * indicates the 2201 peaks. This
12 diagram clearly indicates the plate-like geometry of the 2212 grains, as the (00l)
13 diffraction peaks show higher intensity than the obtained in randomly oriented
14 grains. This effect is only due to the grain geometry which induces a preferential
15 orientation on the sample holder.
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18 The microstructure of these samples is represented in Fig. 8, where a
19 representative longitudinal polished section, corresponding to the S3 sample is
20 shown. EDX analysis of the different contrasts confirm that Bi-2212 is the major
21 phase (gray contrast), accompanied by Bi-2201 (white contrast), as deduced
22 from the XRD data. Moreover, SEM images allow the identification of two minor
23 phases, the black contrast one corresponding to CaO, and the dark gray one to
24 (Ca_{1-x}Sr_x)Cu₂O₃. From the XRD data and the SEM images, it is clear that most
25 of the (Ca_{1-x}Sr_x)CuO₂, CaO, and 2201 phases have reacted to produce the
26 2212 phase. The amount of the different phases has been estimated by image
27 analysis using several SEM micrographs of the annealed rods produced with
28 the four different precursors. Mean values for the content of each phase are
29 very similar for all the samples, with about 95% of Bi-2212, 1% (Ca_{1-x}Sr_x)Cu₂O₃,
30 < 1% CaO, and 3% Bi-2201.
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1 The very similar microstructure and phase content observed previously is
2 reflected in the electrical properties, except for the samples obtained from the
3 S3 precursor, as it is illustrated by Fig. 9, where resistivity vs temperature from
4 77 to 300K is represented. From these data, T_c values have been determined
5 for each sample with values about 89K for the annealed rods prepared with the
6 S1, S2, and S4 precursors, and about 94K for those synthesized with the S3
7 precursor. This important difference in the T_c values has already been
8 evidenced on sintered samples processed under reducing atmosphere [24-26]
9 and it is due to the difference on the δ values, smaller in the case of samples
10 prepared with the S3 precursor.
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24 The evolution found on the T_c values is also maintained on the J_c
25 measurements at 77K represented in Fig. 10. From these data, J_c values were
26 determined using the standard 1 $\mu\text{V}/\text{cm}$ criterion. Samples prepared with the S3
27 precursor have a higher transport capacity (about 3800 A/cm^2) than the
28 obtained by the other three methods (about 3300 A/cm^2), which represents an
29 increase of $\sim 15\%$. The difference is explained by the lower T_c found on the S1,
30 S2 and S4 samples which makes that the J_c measurements (at 77K) are
31 performed at temperatures closer to their T_c (around 89K) than for the S3
32 samples (around 94K).
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46 On the other hand, when transport properties are determined at lower
47 temperatures, the differences on J_c for the different samples become nearly
48 negligible, as illustrated in Fig. 11, where J_c values vs temperature are
49 represented between 78 and 72K. Lower temperatures until $\sim 65\text{K}$ could not be
50 used to determine J_c due to the high increase of the transport properties with
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the decrease of temperature, reaching the intensity source higher limit (about 250 A).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Bi-2212 textured rods have successfully been fabricated from four different types of precursors. The results indicate that the annealed textured rods microstructure is not affected by the phase content and morphology of the starting powder grains.

The high T_c obtained in textured materials obtained from the S3 precursor are assigned to the lower oxygen content found in these samples. This raise in T_c leads to an increase on the J_c values at 77K (about 15%), while at lower temperatures the J_c difference between the different samples turns negligible. These differences are of enough importance to use materials obtained from the S3 precursors when the application would be performed at 77K, while at lower temperatures the S4 precursor would be chosen due to its simplicity and quick conformation.

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Table I

	Starting mixture	750°C 12h	800°C 12h
Solid state	Bi ₂ O ₃	Bi-2201 ^b	Bi-2212 ^b
	SrCO ₃	CaCuO ₂	Bi2201
	CaCO ₃	CuO	CaCuO ₂
	CuO		CuO
Sol-gel	Bi-2201 ^a	Bi-2212 ^a	Bi-2212 ^b
	CaCO ₃	Bi-2201 ^b	Bi2201
	CuO	CaCu ₂ O ₃	CaCu ₂ O ₃
	CaCu ₂ O ₃	CuO	(Sr,Ca)CuO ₂
Polymer	Bi-2201 ^a	Bi-2212 ^a	Bi-2212 ^b
	CaCO ₃	Bi-2201 ^b	Bi2201 ^a
	CuO	Ca ₂ CuO ₃	Ca ₂ CuO ₃ ^a
	Ca ₂ CuO ₃	CuO	

^a minor phase.

^b major phase

Figure captions

1
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5 Figure 1. Schematic representation of the melt quenching system used to
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7 prepare vitreous cylindrical precursors.
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12 Figure 2. Vitreous cylindrical precursors after extraction from the quartz tubes.
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17 Figure 3. Evolution of the particle size vs treatment time for the powders
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19 obtained by the different synthetic methods. ● S1; ◆ S2; and ■ S3.
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25 Figure 4. SEM micrographs of the final powders obtained by the different
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27 synthetic methods: a) S1, b) S2, and c) S3.
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32 Figure 5. SEM micrograph of the fractured cylinder obtained with the S4
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34 precursor. The insert, at higher magnification, shows no evidence of crystals in
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36 the bulk material.
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42 Figure 6. SEM micrograph of a longitudinal polished section performed on the
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44 as-grown textured rods obtained with the S1 precursor. $(\text{Ca}_{1-x}\text{Sr}_x)\text{CuO}_2$,
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46 observed as elongated dark grains, is the primary crystallization phase. Major
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48 gray contrast is associated to the Bi-2201 phase while small black spots are
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50 identified as CaO.
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Figure 7. Typical powder XRD plot of an annealed textured rod, in this case it has been prepared with the S2 precursor. Unmarked peaks correspond to the Bi-2212 phase, while * indicates the Bi-2201 phase peaks.

Figure 8. SEM micrograph of a longitudinal polished section performed on the annealed textured rods obtained with the S2 precursor. Dark gray contrast corresponds to the major phase (Bi-2212), accompanied by Bi-2201 phase (white contrast) and small black spots (CaO).

Figure 9. Resistivity measurements vs. temperature, for textured samples after annealing, as a function of the synthetic method. ● S1; ◆ S2; ■ S3; and ▼ S4.

Figure 10. J measurements vs. electrical field at 77 K, for textured samples after annealing, as a function of the synthetic method. ● S1; ◆ S2; ■ S3; and ▼ S4.

Figure 11. J_c measurements vs. temperature, for textured samples after annealing, as a function of the synthetic method. ● S1; ◆ S2; ■ S3; and ▼ S4.

Figure 1
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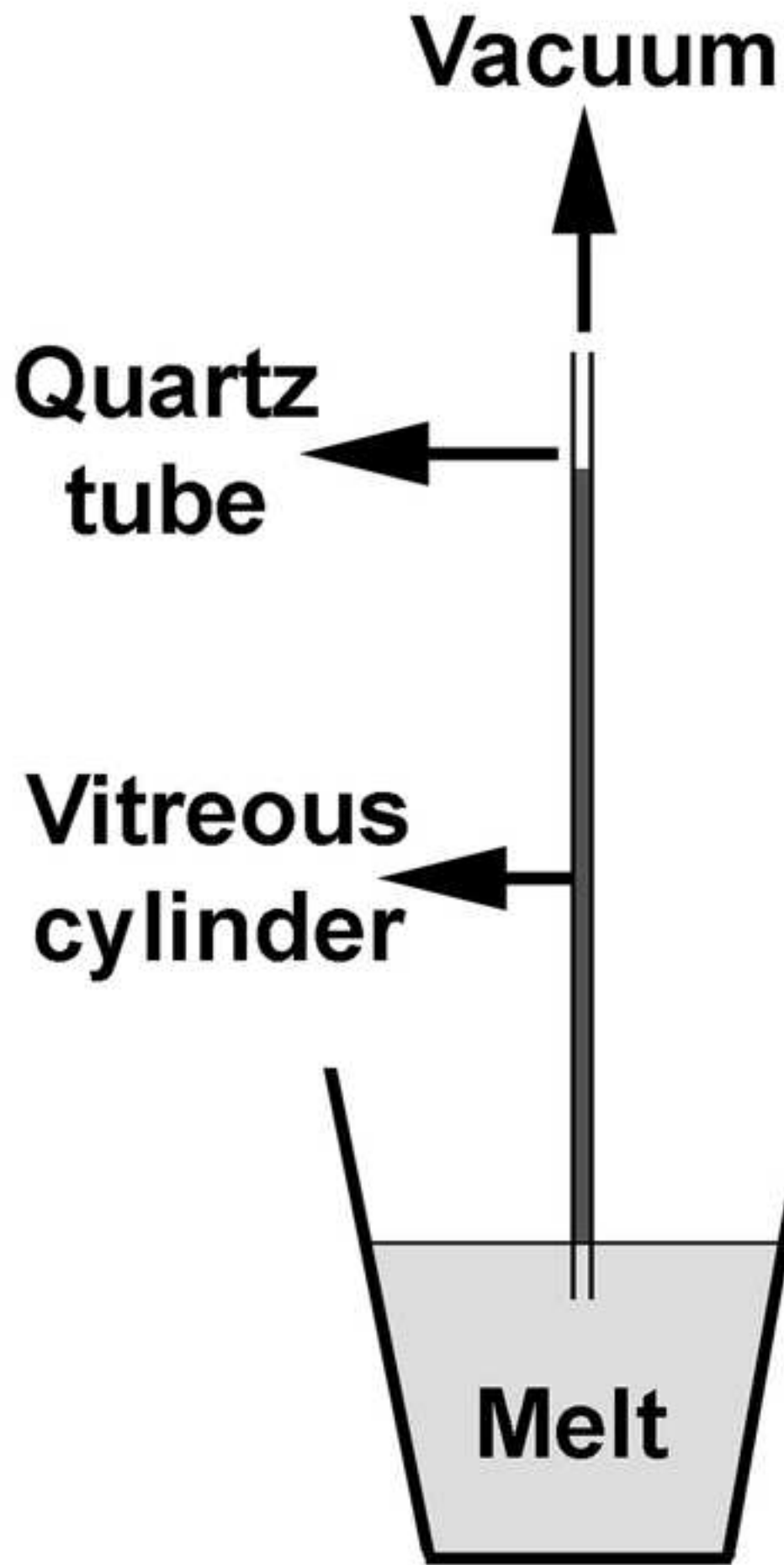


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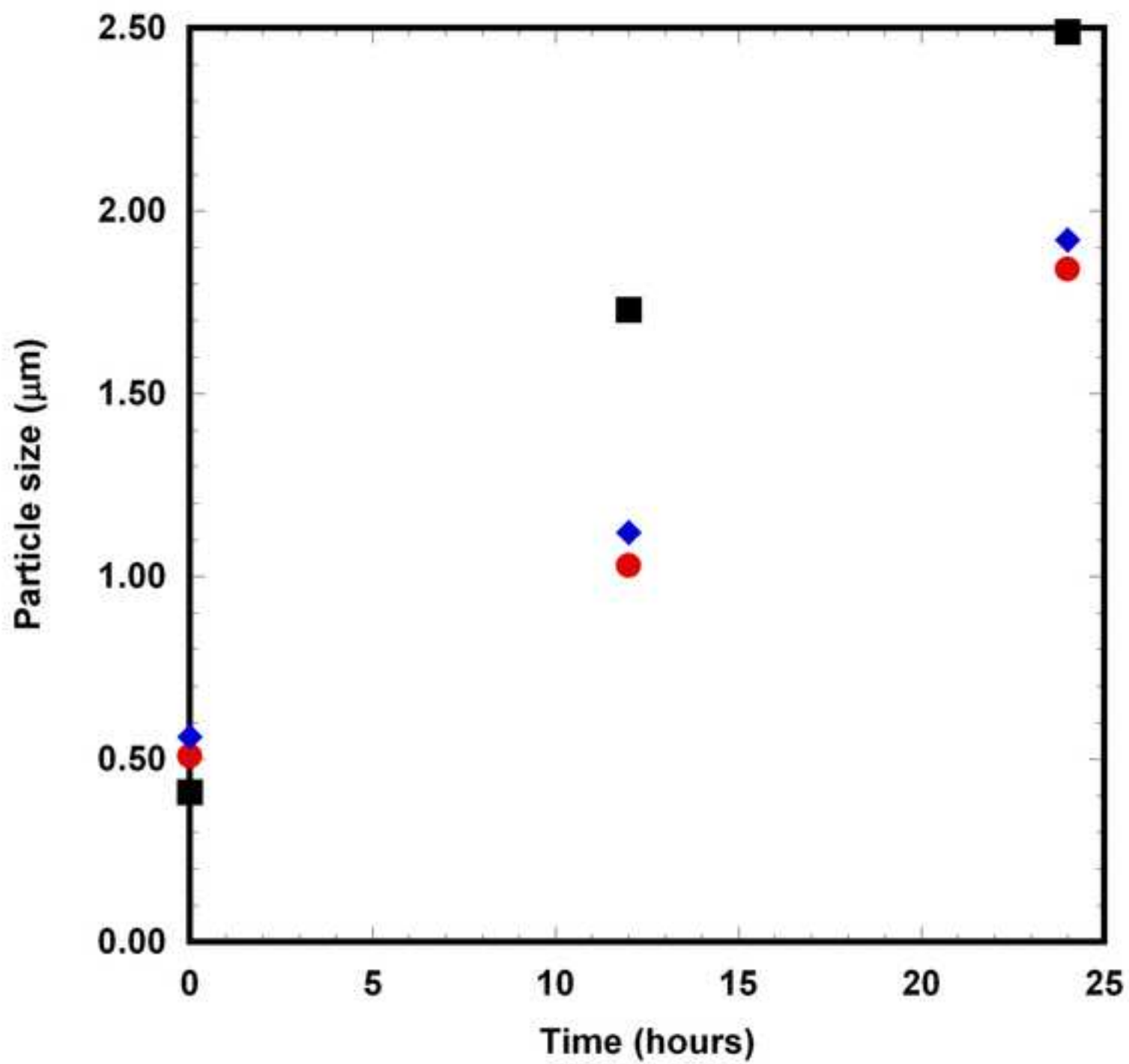


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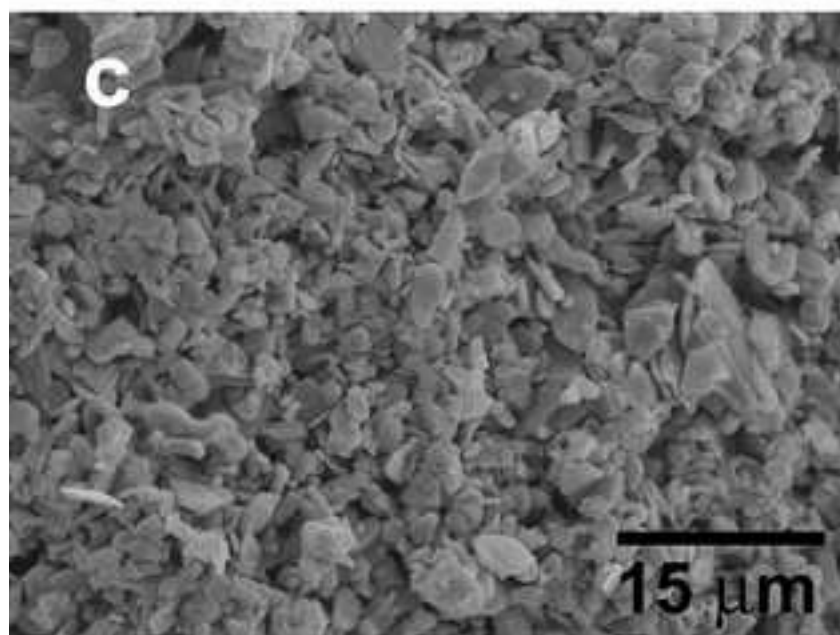
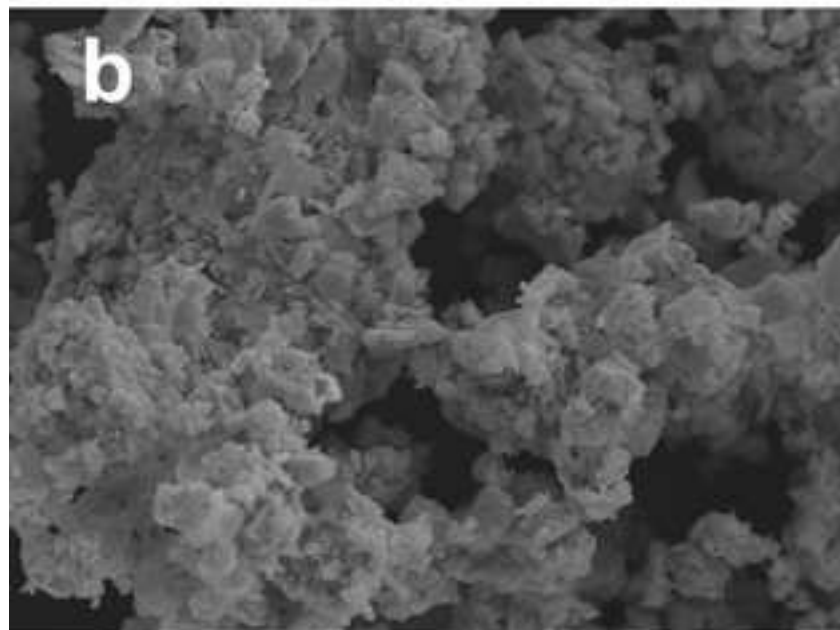
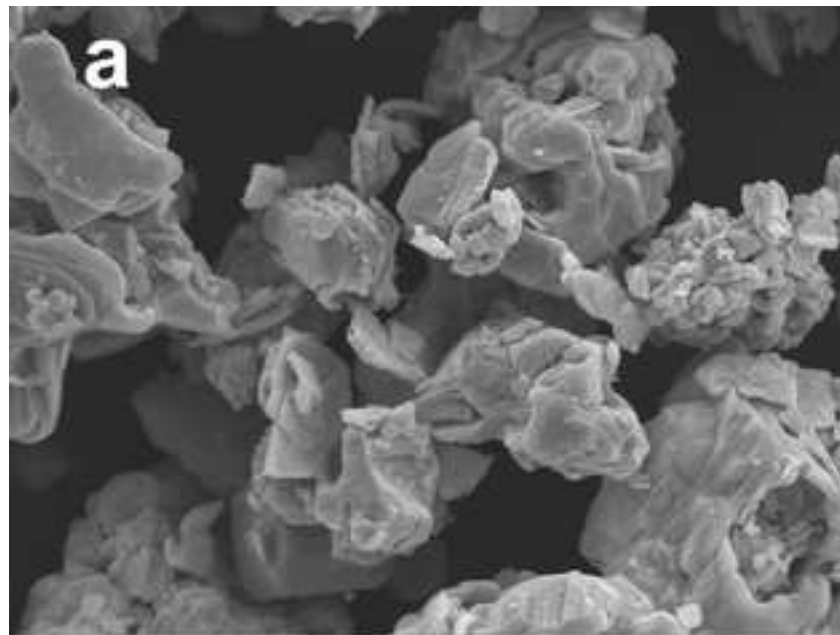


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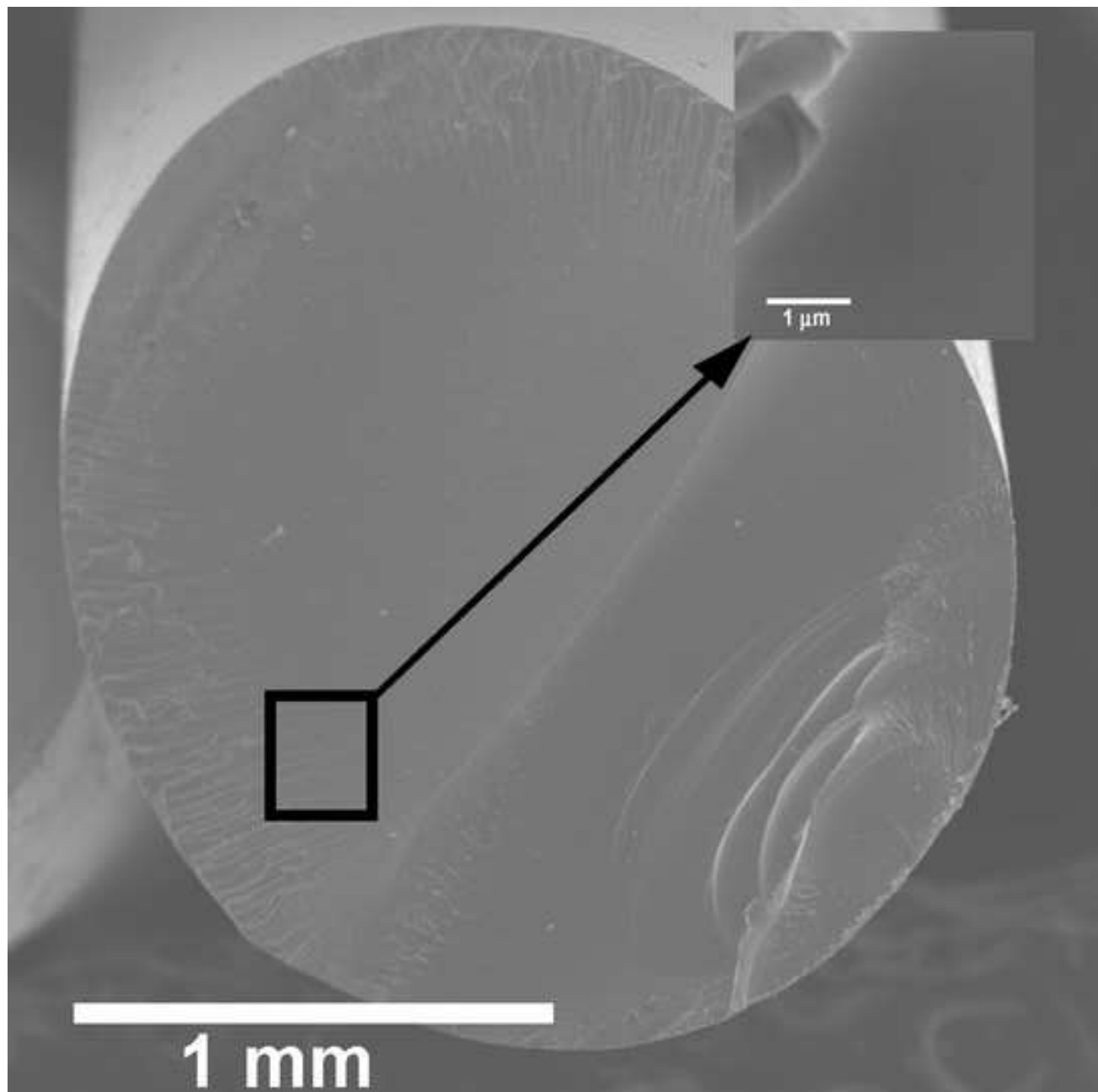


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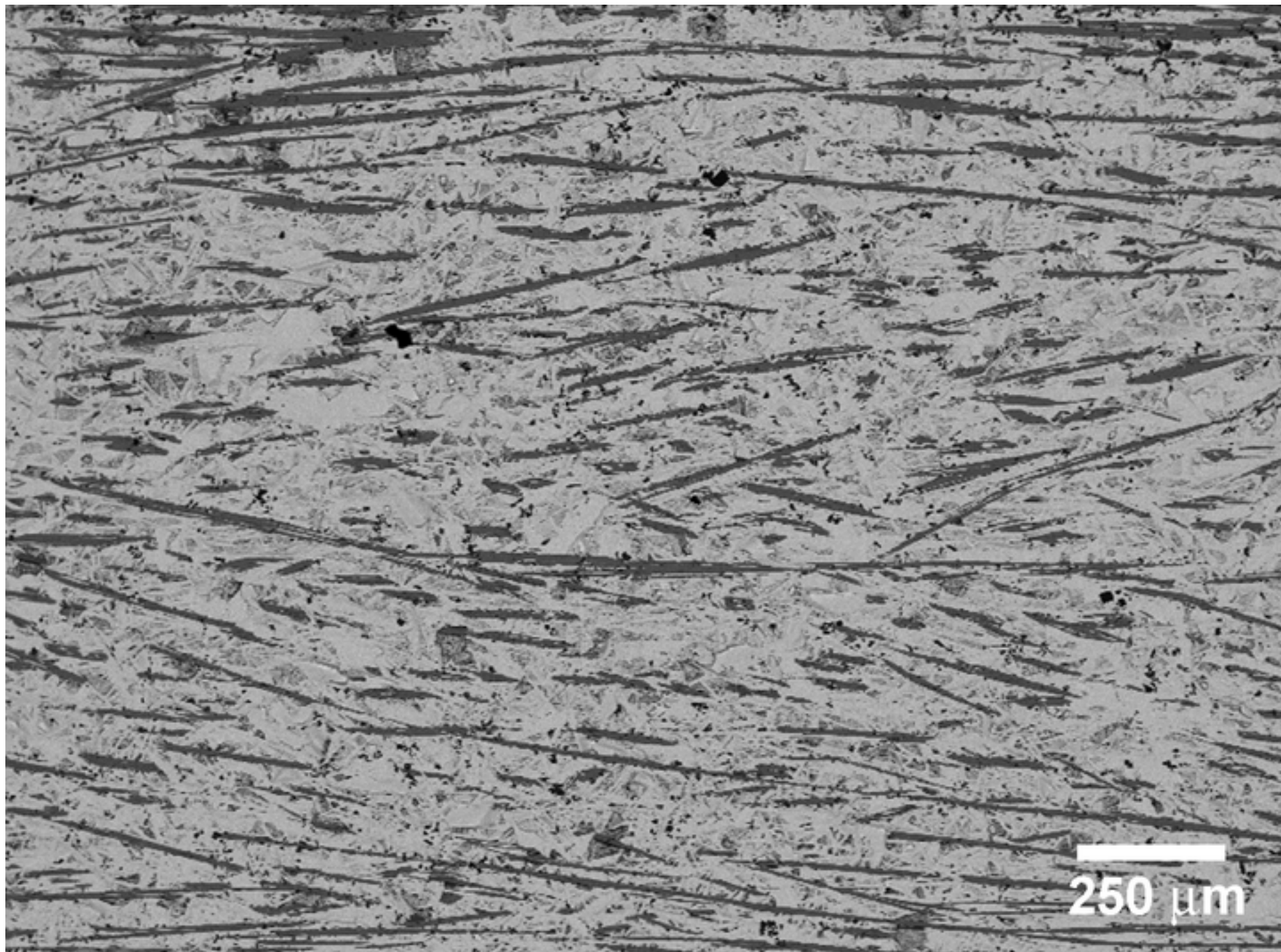


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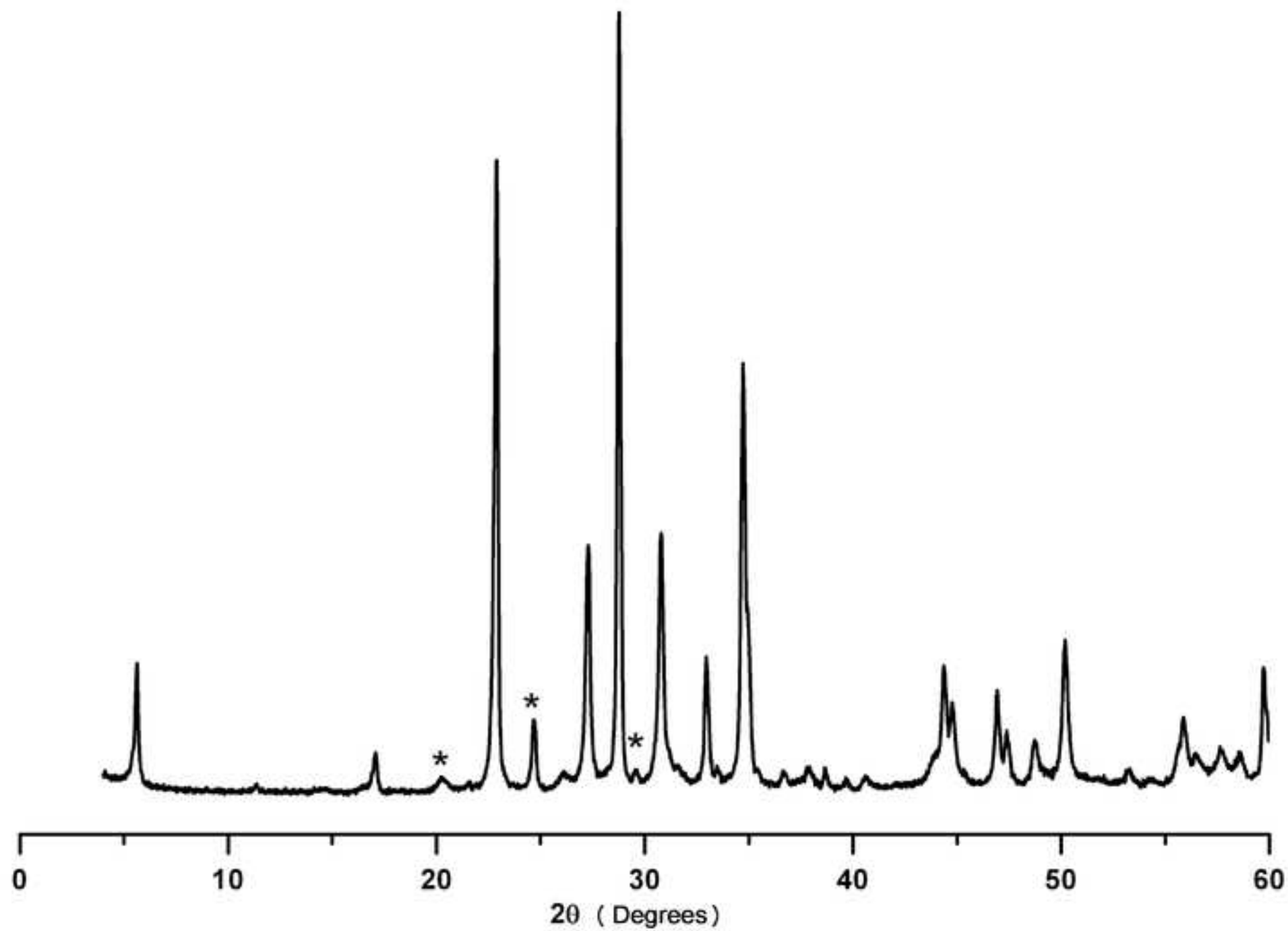


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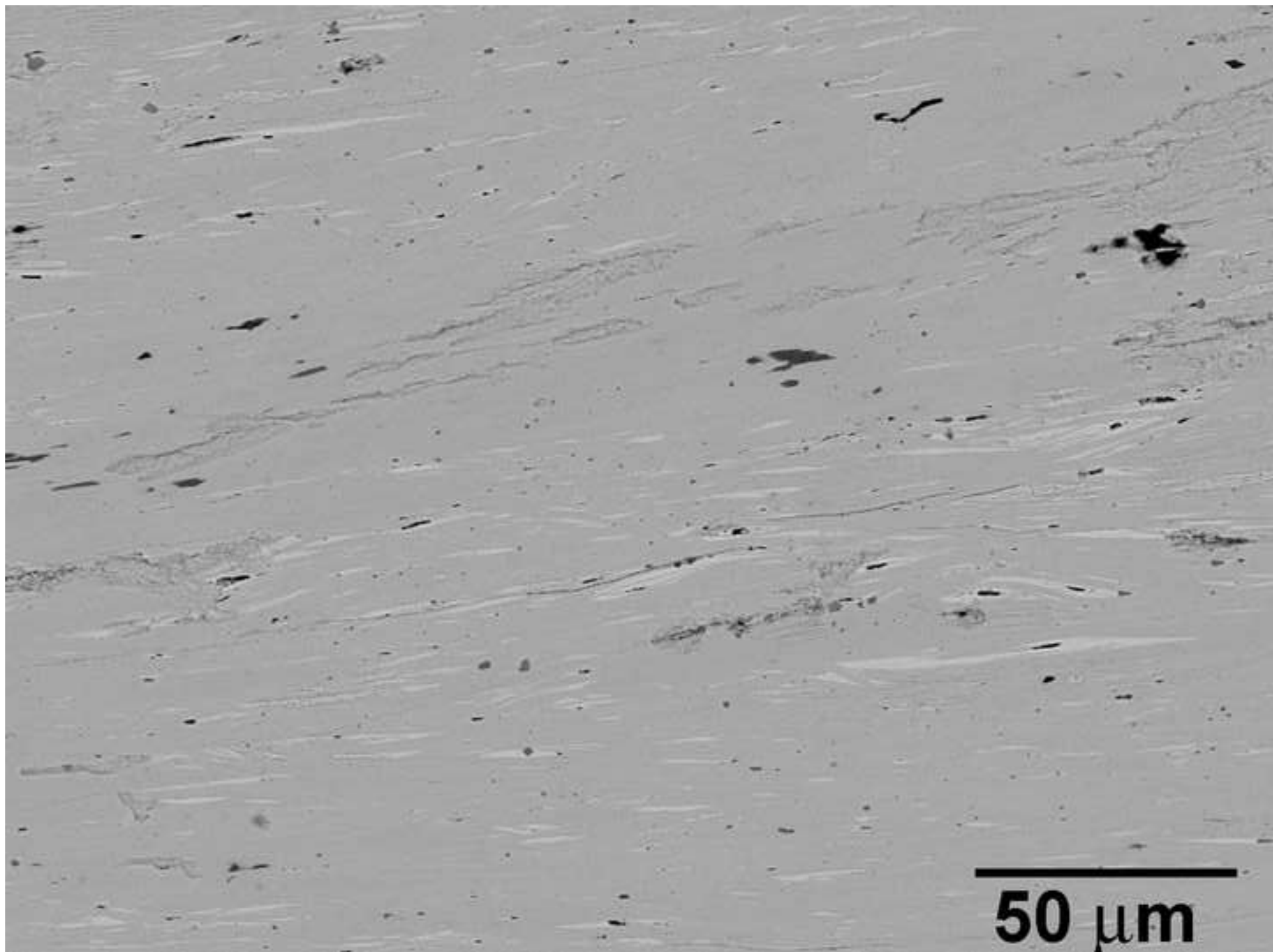


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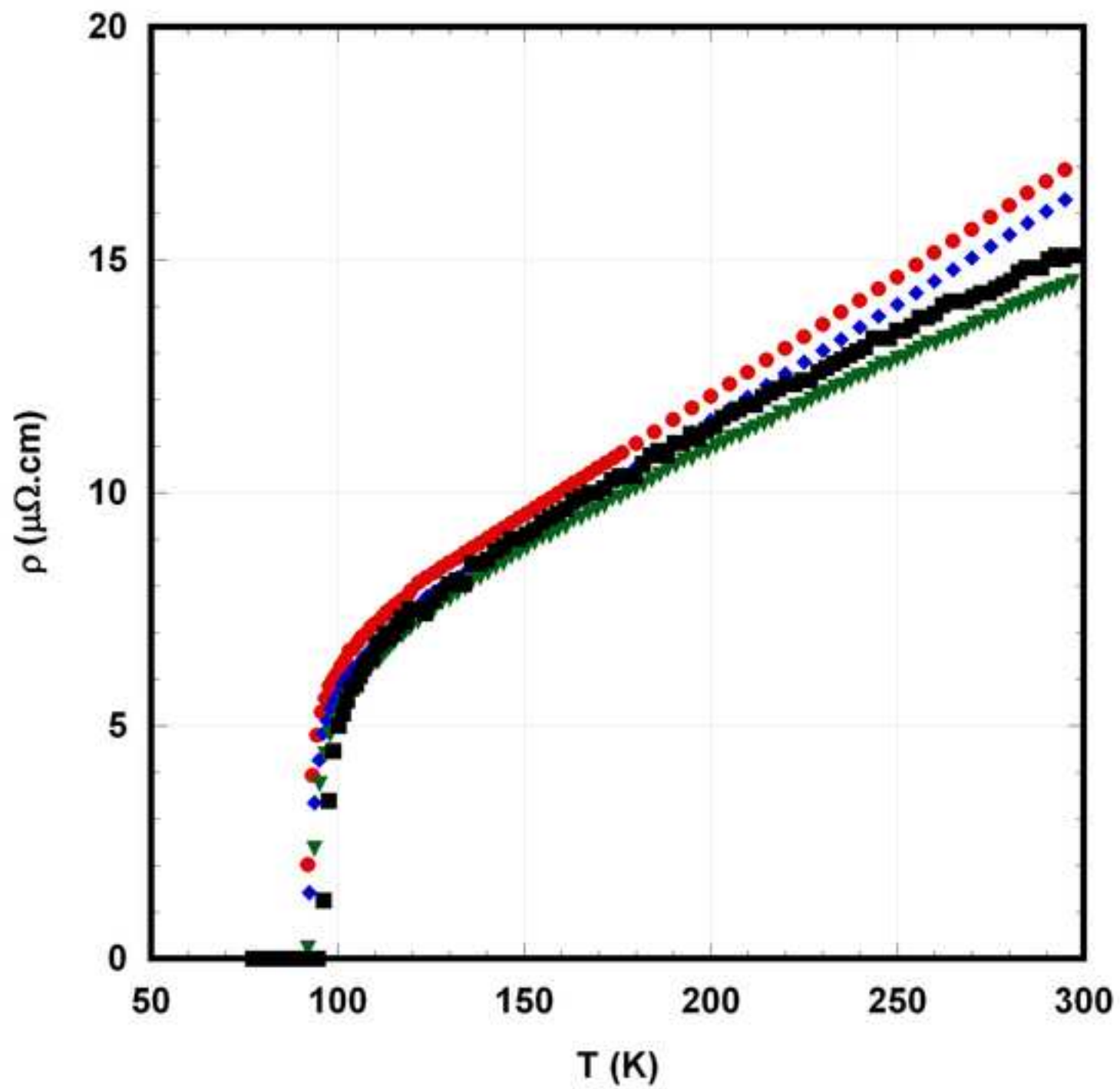


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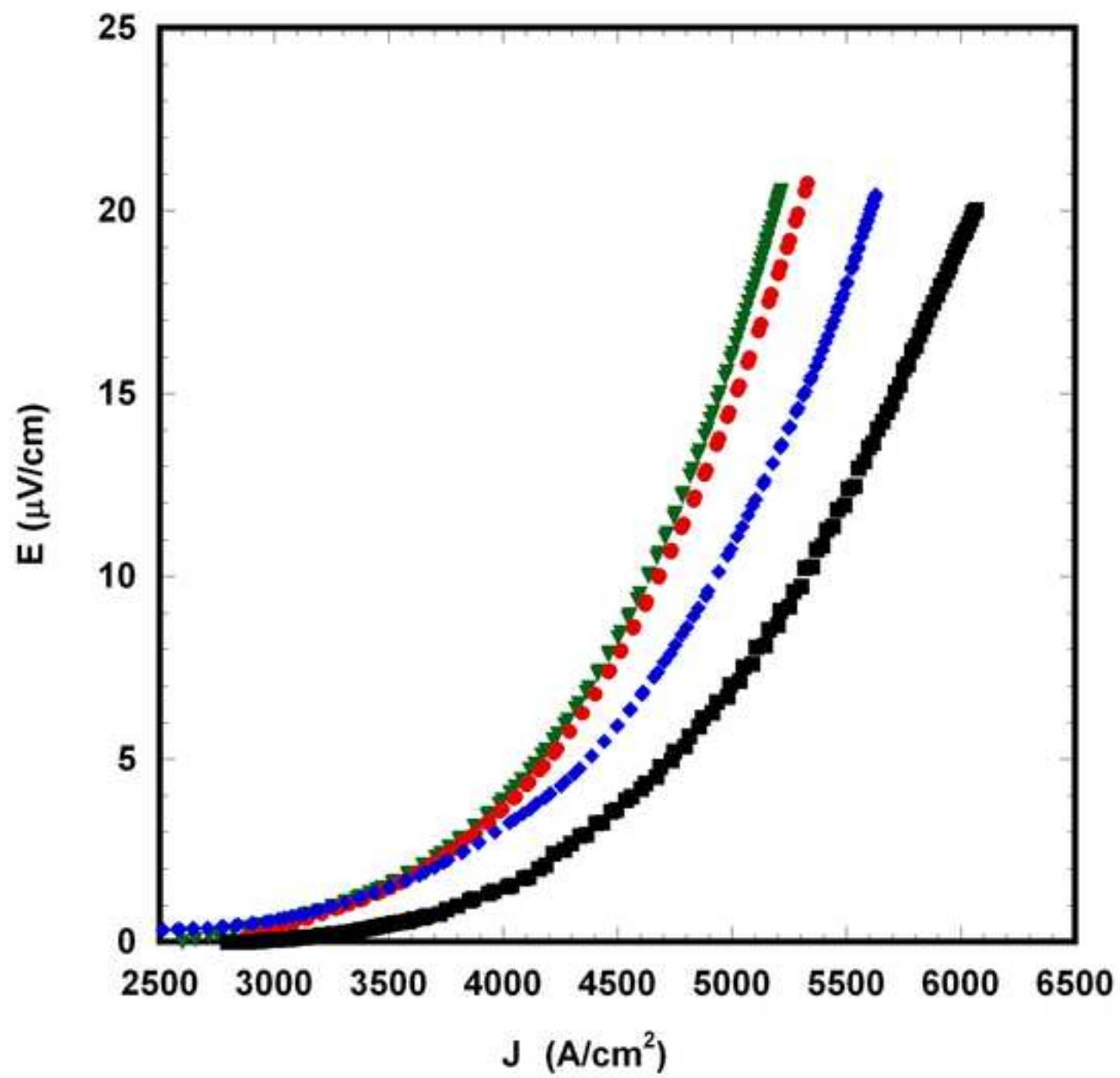


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