



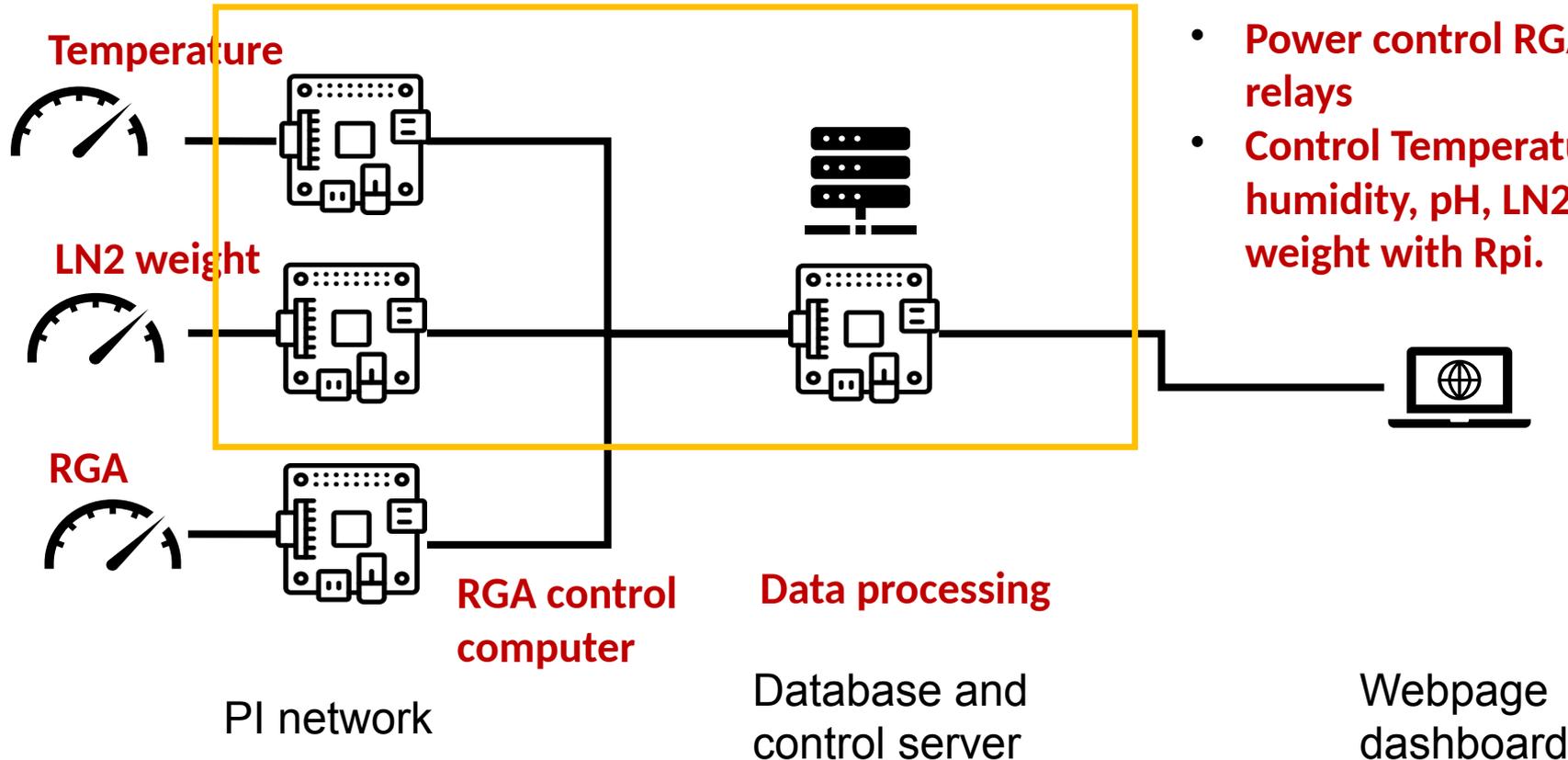
National Center for CryoEM Access and Training

Cryo-EM hardware
supporting a facility

SPA short Course 03 - 17 - 2026
Michael Alink

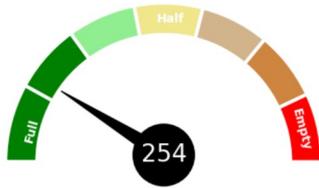
Architecture SEMCf

Connect multiple Raspberry Pi's together

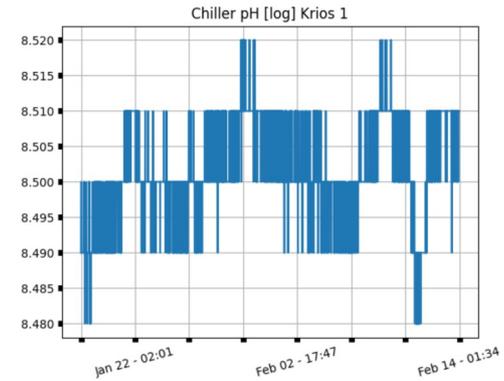
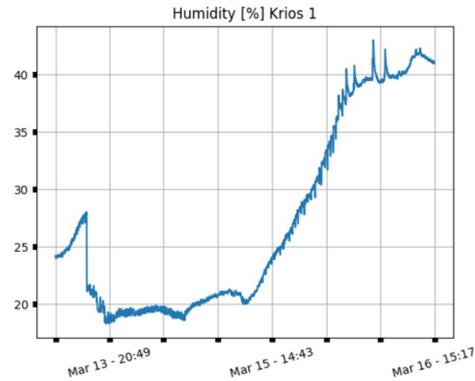
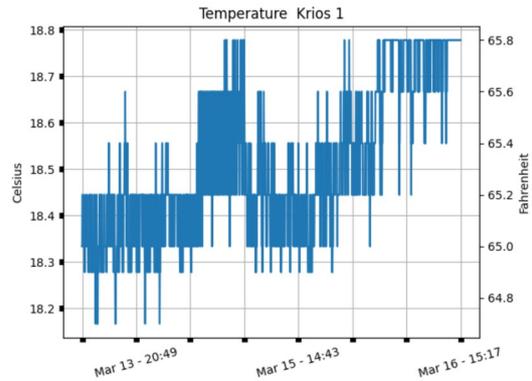
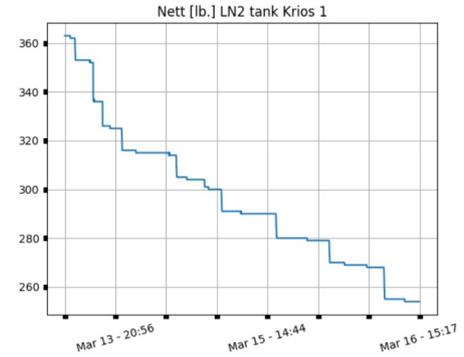


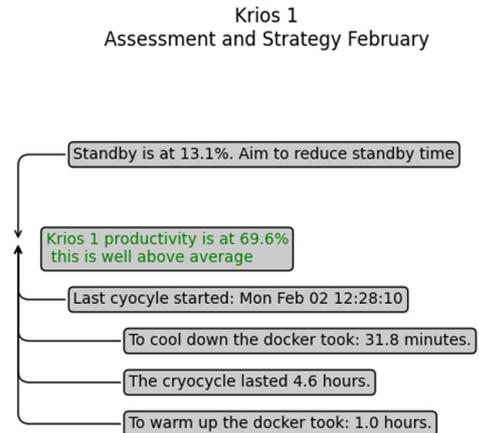
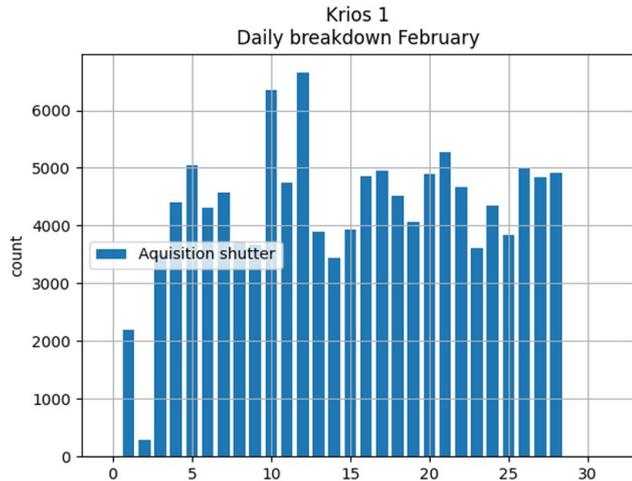
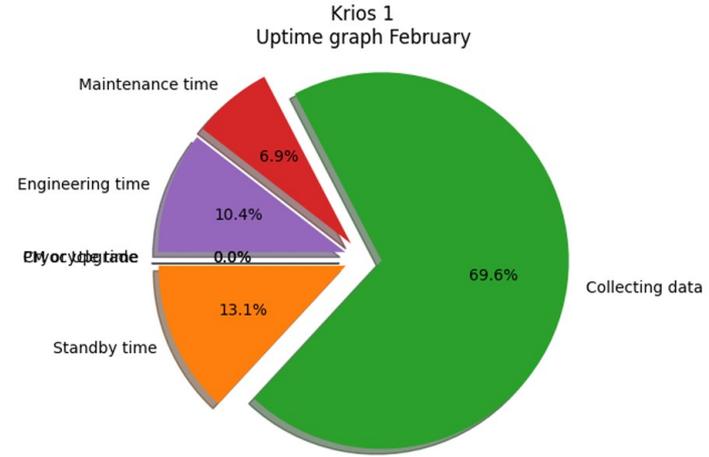
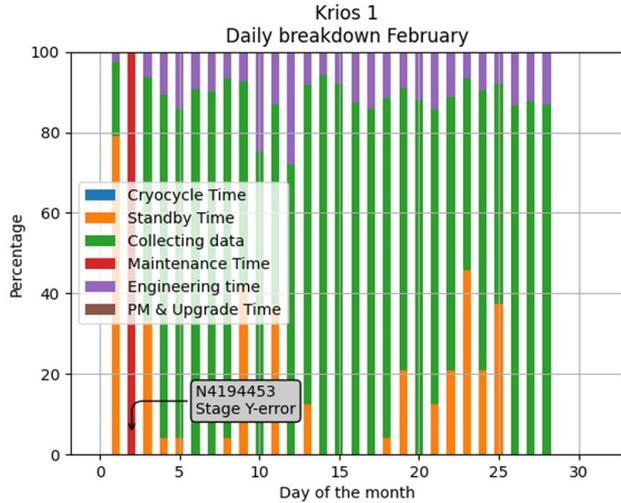
- Python for data processing
- Interactive webpage for visualizing data
- Power control RGA using relays
- Control Temperature, humidity, pH, LN2 tank weight with Rpi.

Webpage overview

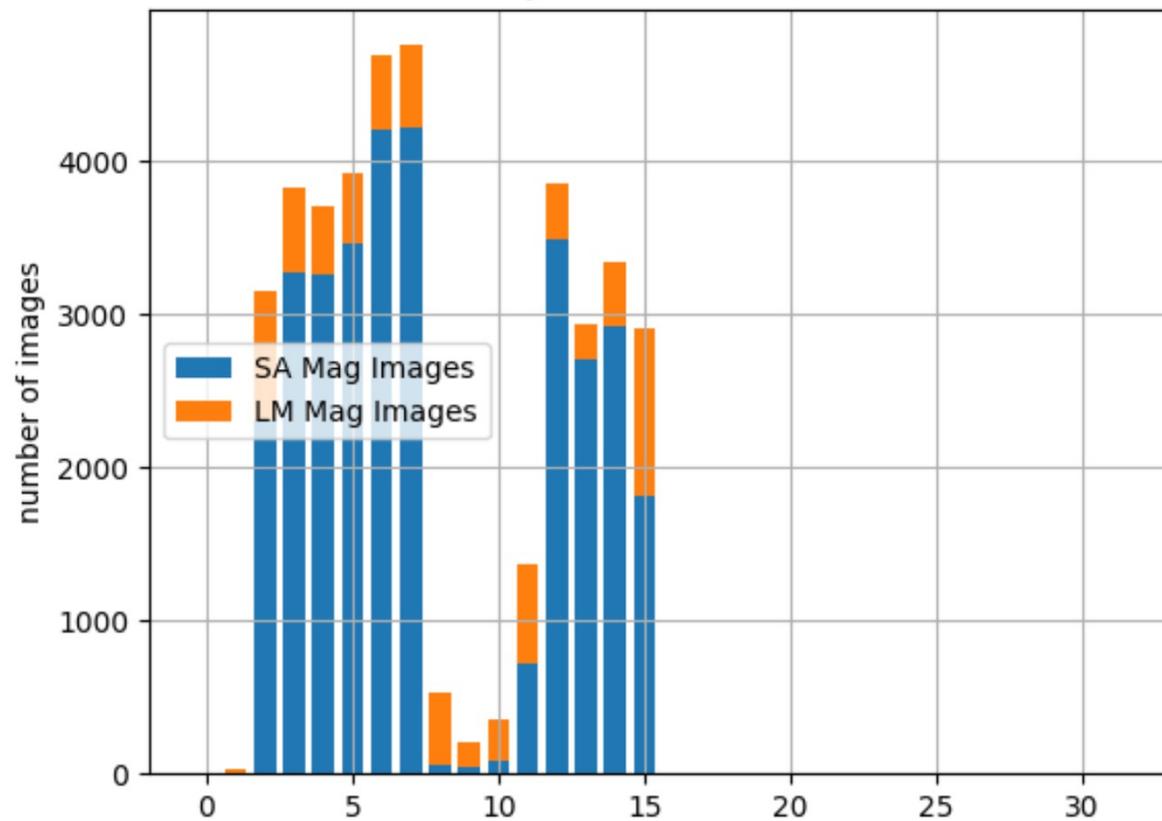


Nett weight [lb] LN2 tank Krios 1

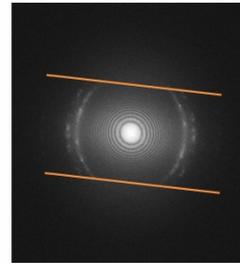
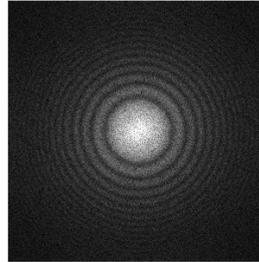
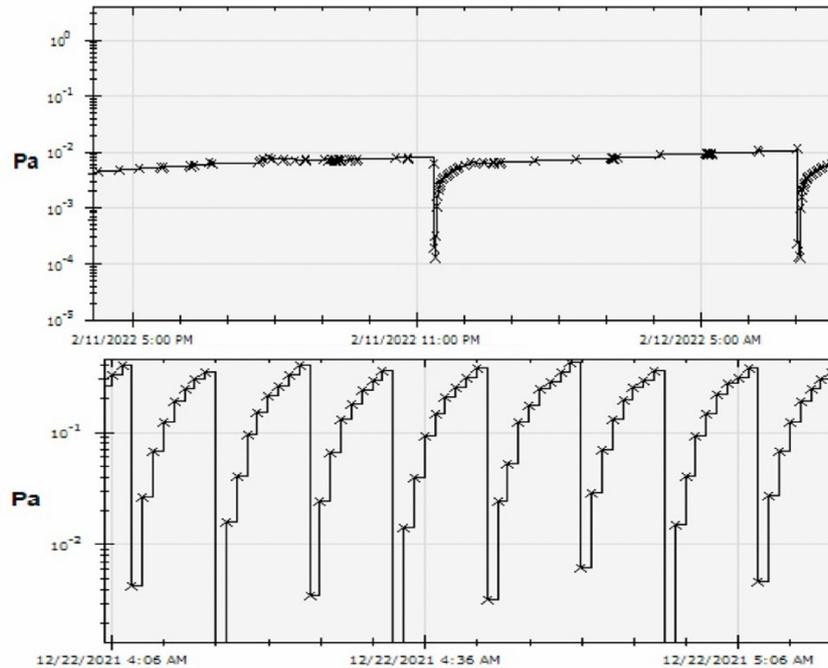




Krios 3 throughput
Daily breakdown March



Patterns revealing vacuum leak



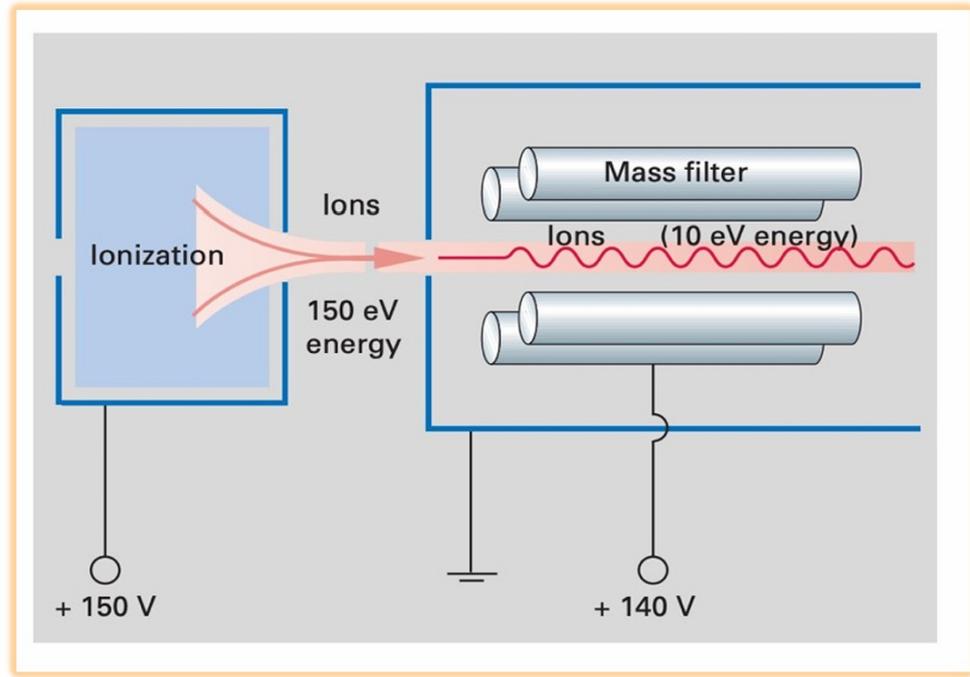
Top: Graph showing auto loader pressure where the turbo pump (TMP) expels gasses every eight hours; no loss of resolution is observed.

Bottom: Bad vacuum, the buffer cycle is needed every half hour. Negative impact on data resolution as high frequency information is cut off. The high number of purges also impacts throughput.

Residual gas analysis

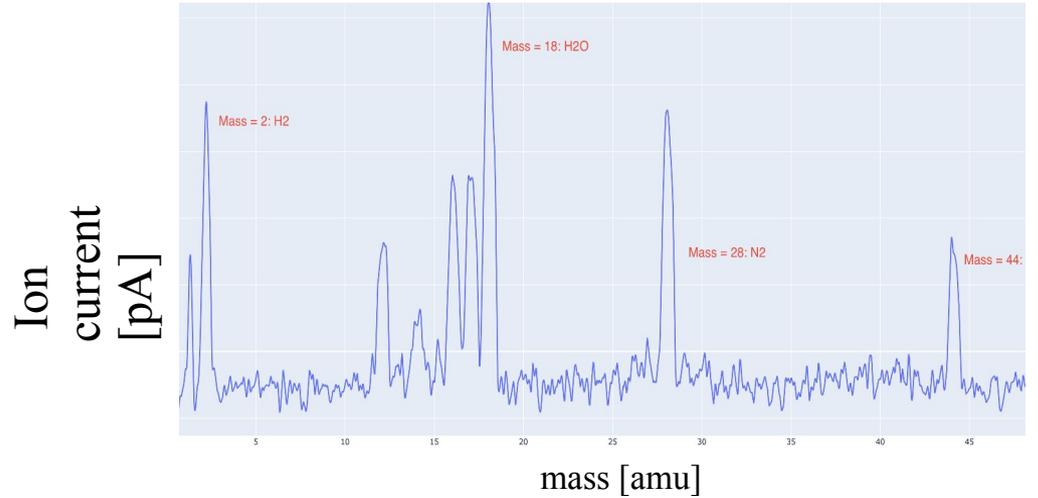
Mass spectrometer

- Check vacuum quality (presence of water and contaminants)
- Optimize cryo cycle and camera anneal time
- Upload data to server for analysis by machine learning algorithm

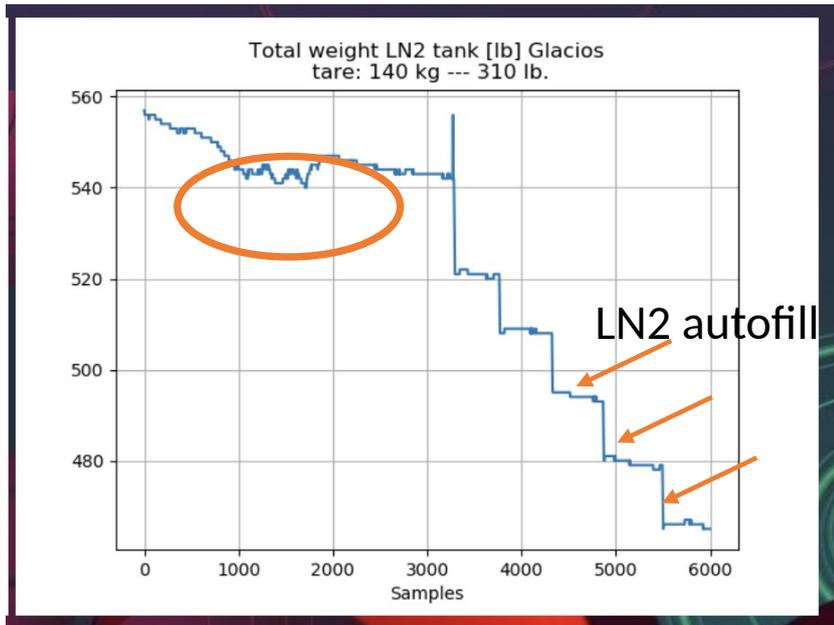


Webpage user interface

- Python code
- Interactive visualization
- Linear / log plots
- Dynamic graphs

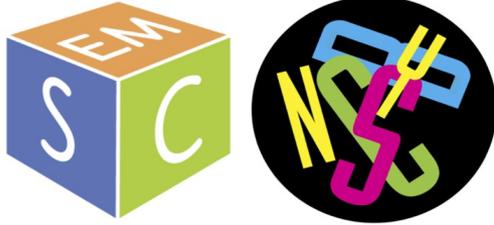


RGA spectrum visualized by Python



Tank failure:

- Frozen valve
- Excessive ice built up
- Too little pressure

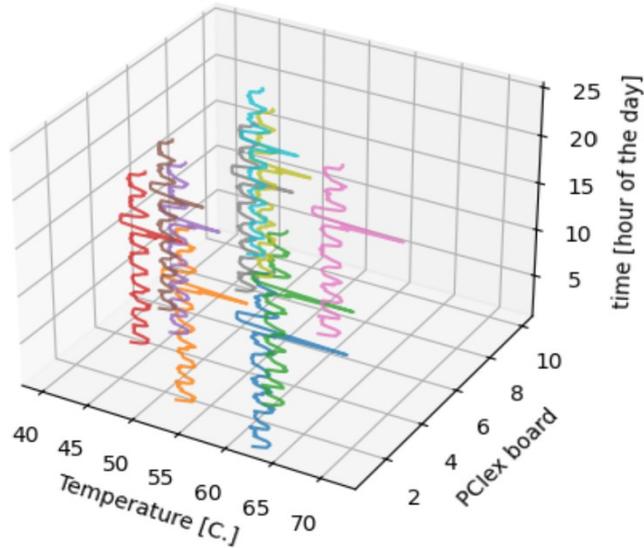


Below is the temperature distribution in the Gatan image server.

The graph shows 5 PCIe card, each has two processor temperatures.

Temperature should stay be stable away from the threshold

Gatan Image Server temperatures [C]
Krios 2 2026-02-11



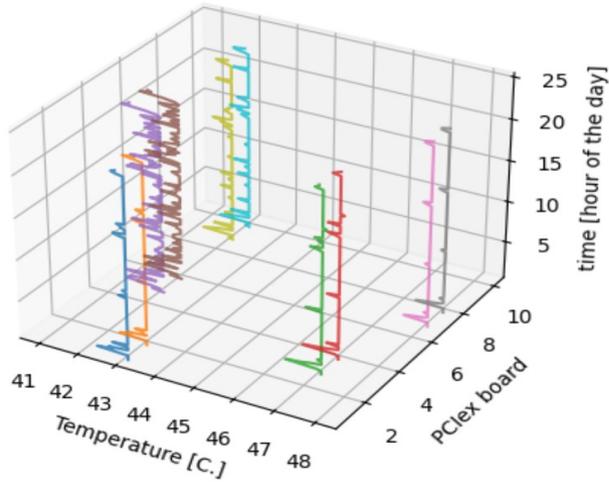


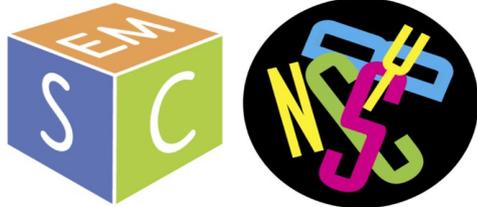
Below is the temperature distribution in the Gatan image server.

The graph shows 5 PCIe card, each has two processor temperatures.

Temperature should stay be stable away from the threshold

Gatan Image Server temperatures [C]
Krios 1 2026-01-31

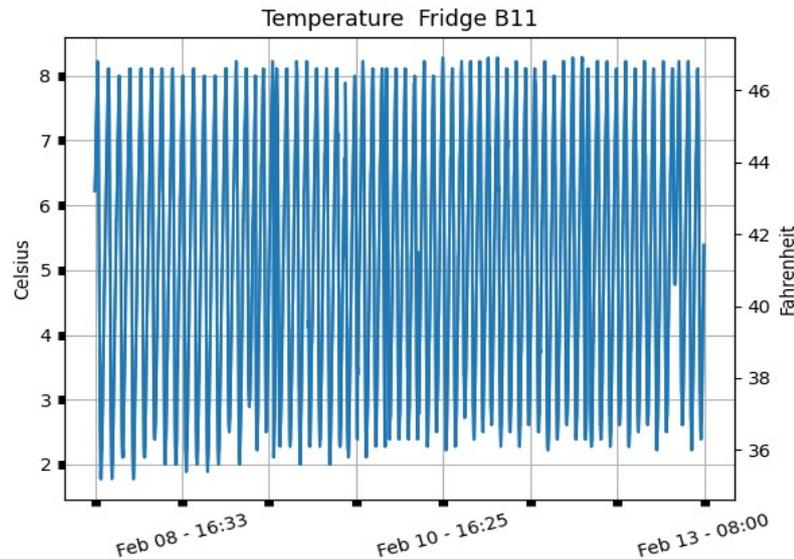




Monitoring scientific fridges

Alarm is emailed if temperature is outside the range 2 - 8 deg. C.

Raspberry PI is currently controlling the on / off duty cycle.



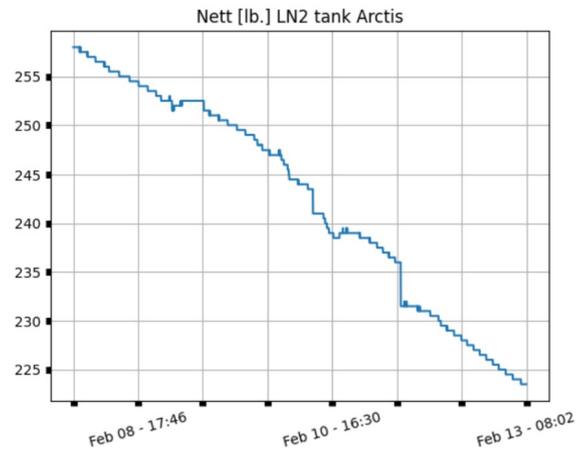
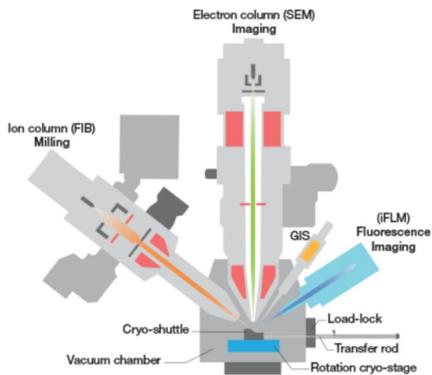


Liquid LN2 cooling capacity

===>>> Hydra & Mass Spec N2 tank weight <<<===



Nett weight [lb] LN2 tank Arctis



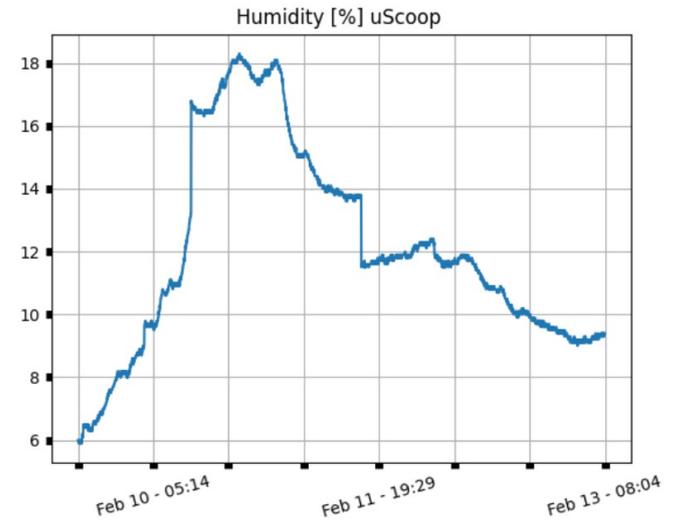
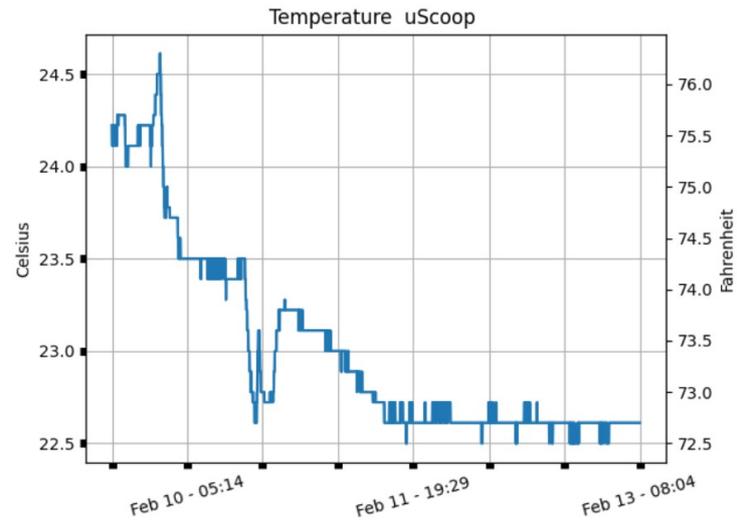


Microscoop sample preparation station

Monitor sends an alarm if temperature is too high.

This would cause the laser to switch off

====>>> Syncell Microscoop <<<====



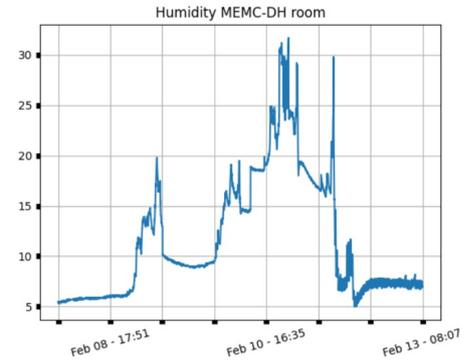
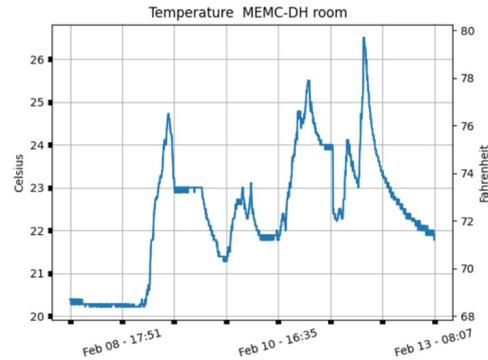
Temperature and humidity is monitored and displayed real time in the dH rooms to show users the operating conditions

☰ menu



SIMONS ELECTRON MICROSCOPY CENTER

===>>> MEMC - DH room - Temperature: 71.4 F - Humidity: 7 % <<<===

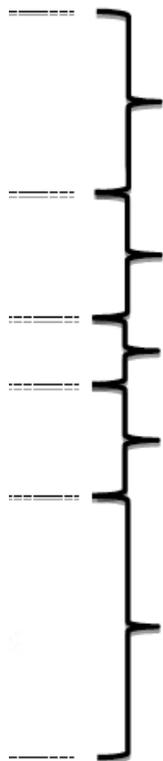




Keep you Krios in good shape: 4th Generation Krios-TEM

Designed for high throughput
Fringe Free Imaging (FFI)
Aberration free Image shift (AFIS)
Falcon IV camera
Electron event representation (EER)

Microscope top - bottom



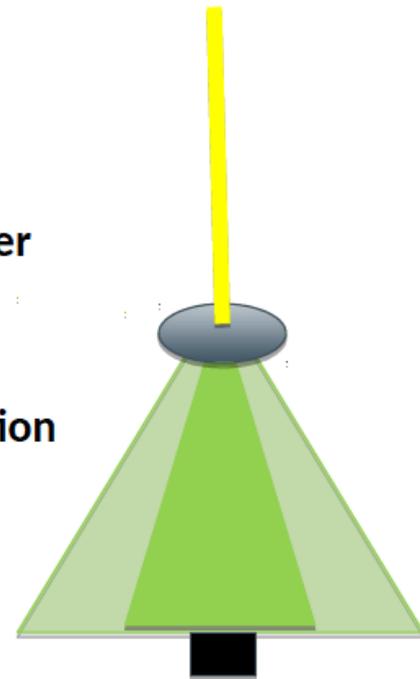
Source: gun

Illumination: condenser

Imaging: objective

magnification: projection

detection: camera's



Some more facts



- A Titan is NOT a Tecnai!

ThermoFisher is not ZEISS or JEOL or Hitachi):

the optics are different!

- COLUMN alignments are not the same as

DIRECT alignments



What NOT to do:

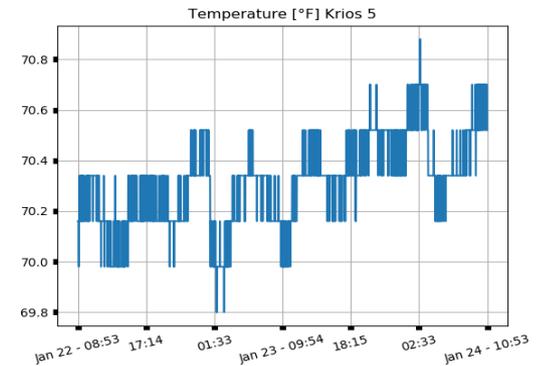
-You do NOT need to realign your microscope daily just out of routine!

-If you do not EXACTLY know what an

alignment step does:

DON'T DO ALIGNMENTS!

- The user is often more unstable than the microscope or the room



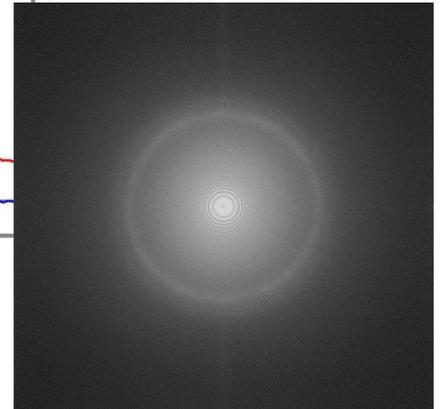
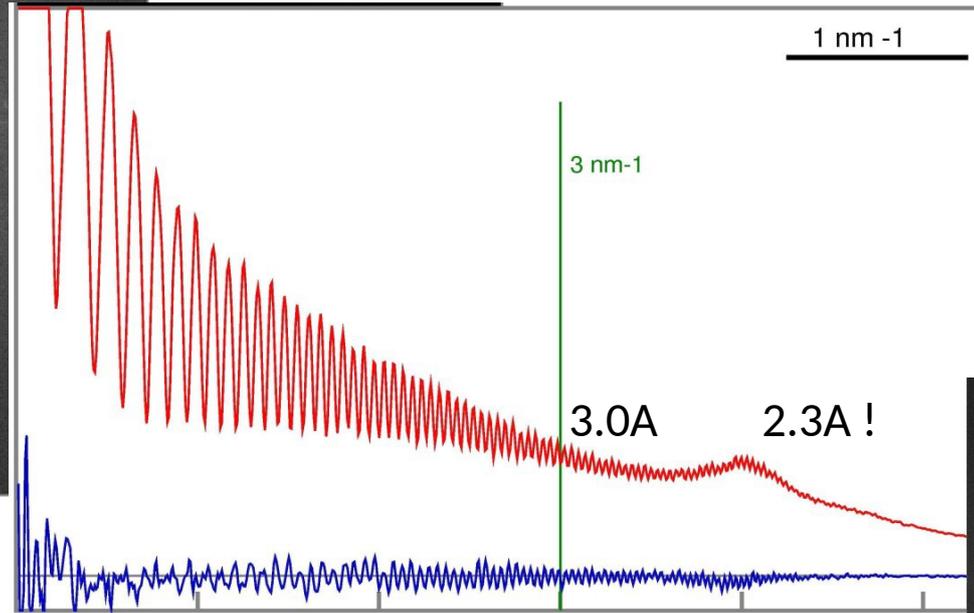
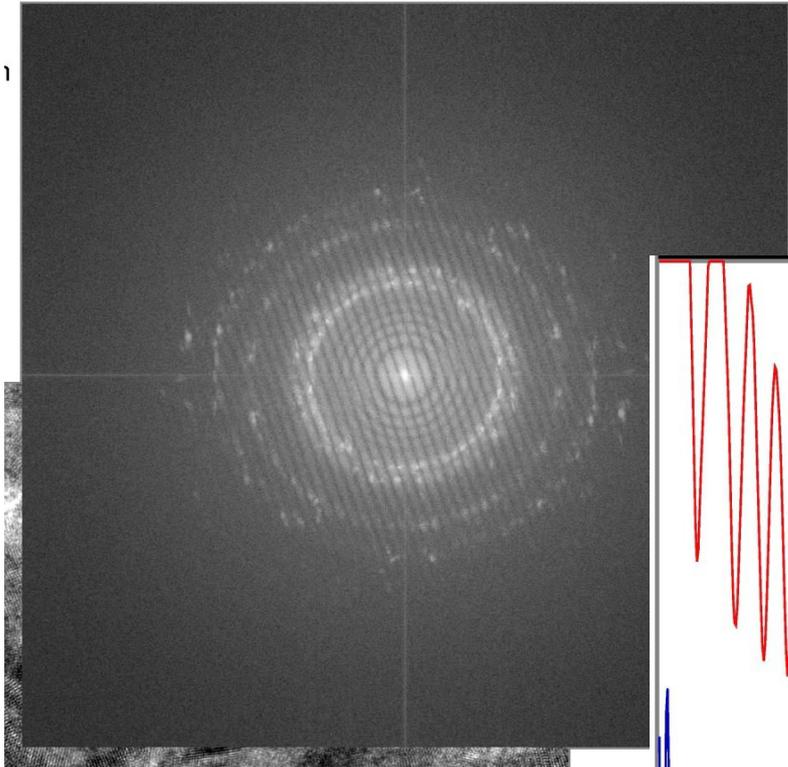


How to setup you're scope

You should be:

- At Eucentric height
- At Eucentric focus
- Parallel
- Objective stigmated
- Coma free
- Dose rate

You should see something like this:



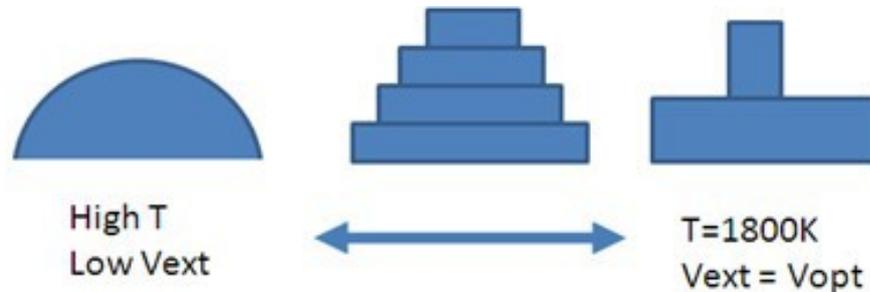
Gun: stability, brightness, dE

If the temperature is low, and the extraction voltage is high

- The tip end form will evolve in a single facet.
This end form is stable resulting in a stable current

If the temperature is too high or if the extraction voltage is too low

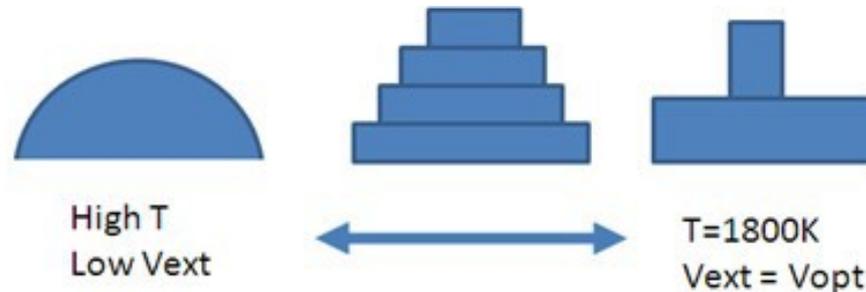
- The tip end form will evolve into a blunt round shape (low brightness)



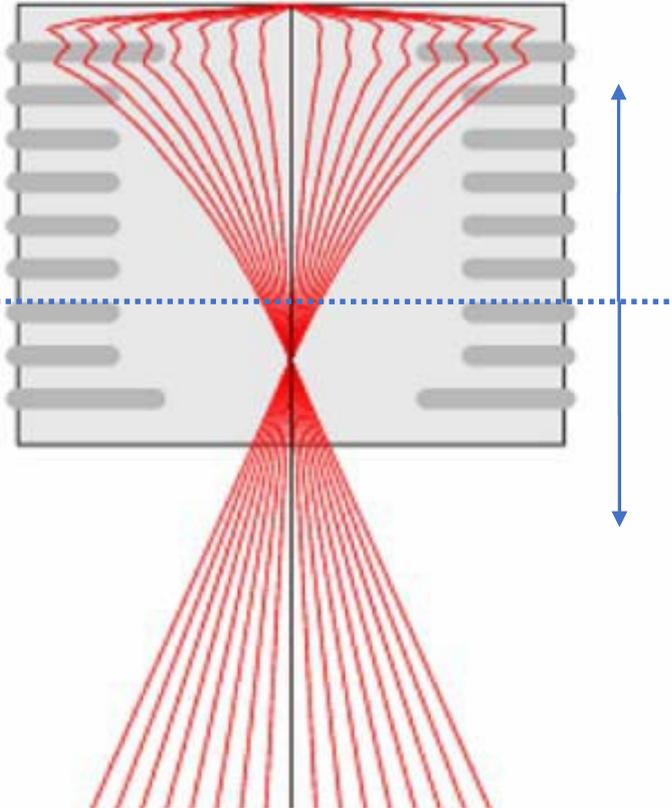
Gun: stability, brightness, dE

Emission characteristics with high brightness

- But too high extraction voltage increases energy spread of electrons
Too low temperature makes the emission sensitive for pressure variations
- Compromise: $T < 1800\text{K}$. Screen current checked with spot = gun = 1.
Screen current about 50nA
acceptable dE & good Brightness & reasonable stability



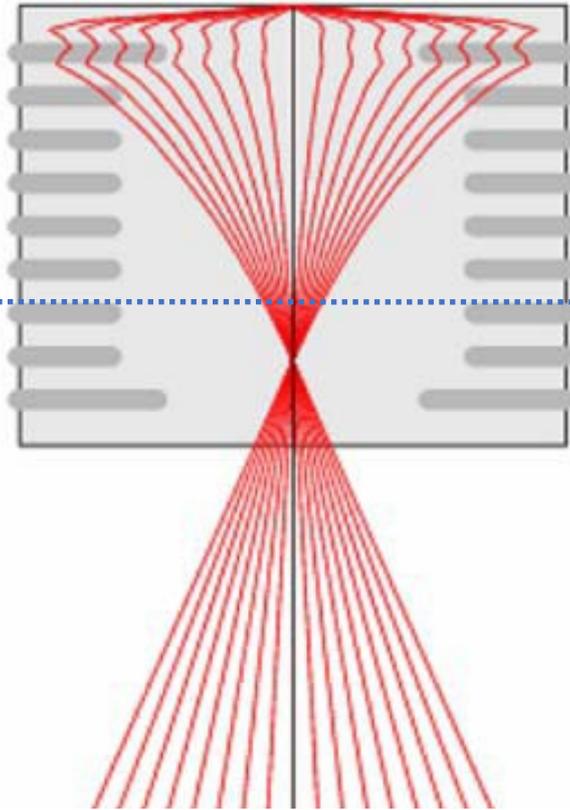
Gun settings



Do you know what happens when you:

- Change the HT?
 - Change the extractor?
 - Change the gun lens?
-
- Do not work with the cross-over (XO) outside of the gun lens: increase in V_{extr} and decrease in HT need to be compensated by a stronger GL
 - If you do not do STEM: **DON'T TOUCH THE GUN SETTINGS**

Gun settings



Stronger gun lens
(higher number)

Higher Vextr,
Lower HT

Do you know what happens when you:

- Change the HT?
- Change the extractor?
- Change the gun lens?

If your answer was NO:

DON'T TOUCH THE GUN SETTINGS

Gun alignment

Not that unstable that you need to do this daily!

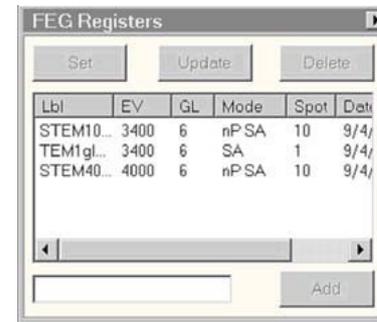
Try to avoid spot size 1

Align only when needed: whole gun alignment

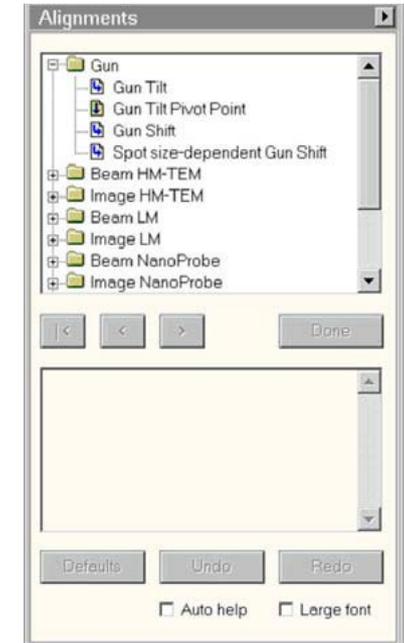
The Gun XO is the most important step,
therefore only do a complete gun alignment

Avoid direct gun alignments

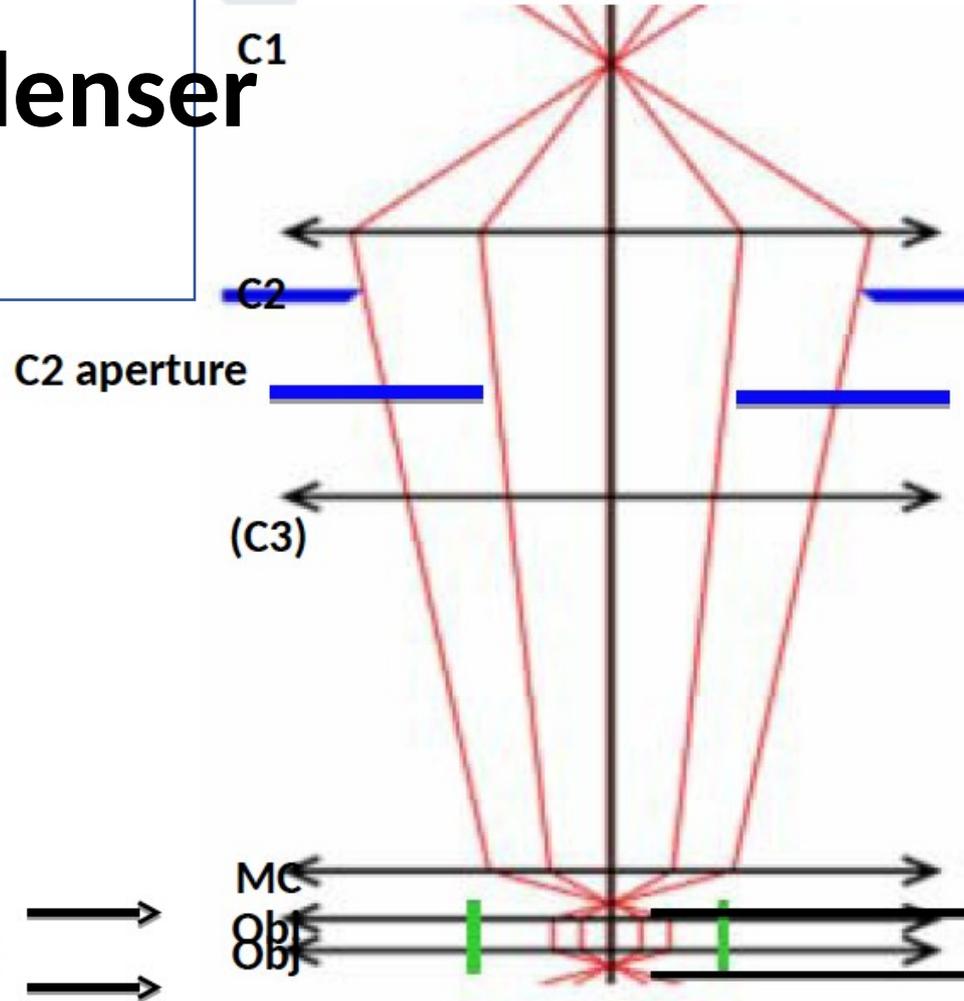
- Save a gun alignment in the FEG registers.
- That is what they are for! (delete the old one)



Lbl	EV	GL	Mode	Spot	Date
STEM10...	3400	6	nPSA	10	9/4/
TEM1gl...	3400	6	SA	1	9/4/
STEM40...	4000	6	nPSA	10	9/4/



Condenser



IF the **last condenser XO** is at the **front focal plane** of the obj lens THEN the **diffraction pattern** is focused at the **back focal plane** (obj XO) AND we have parallel illumination by definition.

All is fixed!!! Only the C2 aperture determines illuminated area.

Condenser system

- How to find parallel illumination

Where is the back focal plane?

How to put your eye site at the back focal plane (BPF)?

How do you know you are focused at the BPF?

What is also in the back focal plane?

How to focus the back focal plane?

How to find the front focal plane?

When am I parallel?

Condenser system

- How to find parallel illumination

Where is the back focal plane?

How to put your eye site at the back focal plane (BPF)?

How do you know you are focused at the BPF?

What is also in the back focal plane?

How to focus the back focal plane?

How to find the front focal plane?

When am I parallel?

Condenser system

- How to find parallel illumination

Where is the back focal plane?

Where the diffraction pattern lies.

How to put your eye site at the back focal plane (BPF)? Switch to diffraction

How do you know you are focused at the BPF? Find something fixed in the BFP

What is also in the back focal plane? The objective aperture

How to focus the back focal plane? Sharpen the obj aperture with focus

How to find the front focal plane? Change intensity till diffraction pattern is focused

When am I parallel? When simultaneous the diffraction pattern

and the objective aperture are focused

Parallel illumination

- With FOCUS sharpen the objective aperture
- With INTENSITY sharpen the diffraction pattern

-DO NOT TURN THE
TWO BUTTONS AT
THE SAME TIME

-Sharp diffraction
pattern with blurry
obj aperture is NOT
parallel!



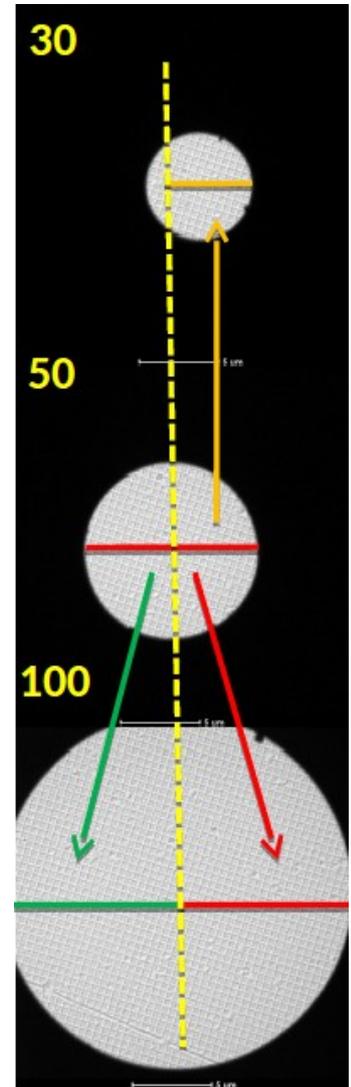
Rules of parallel illumination

Parallel settings should not change when:

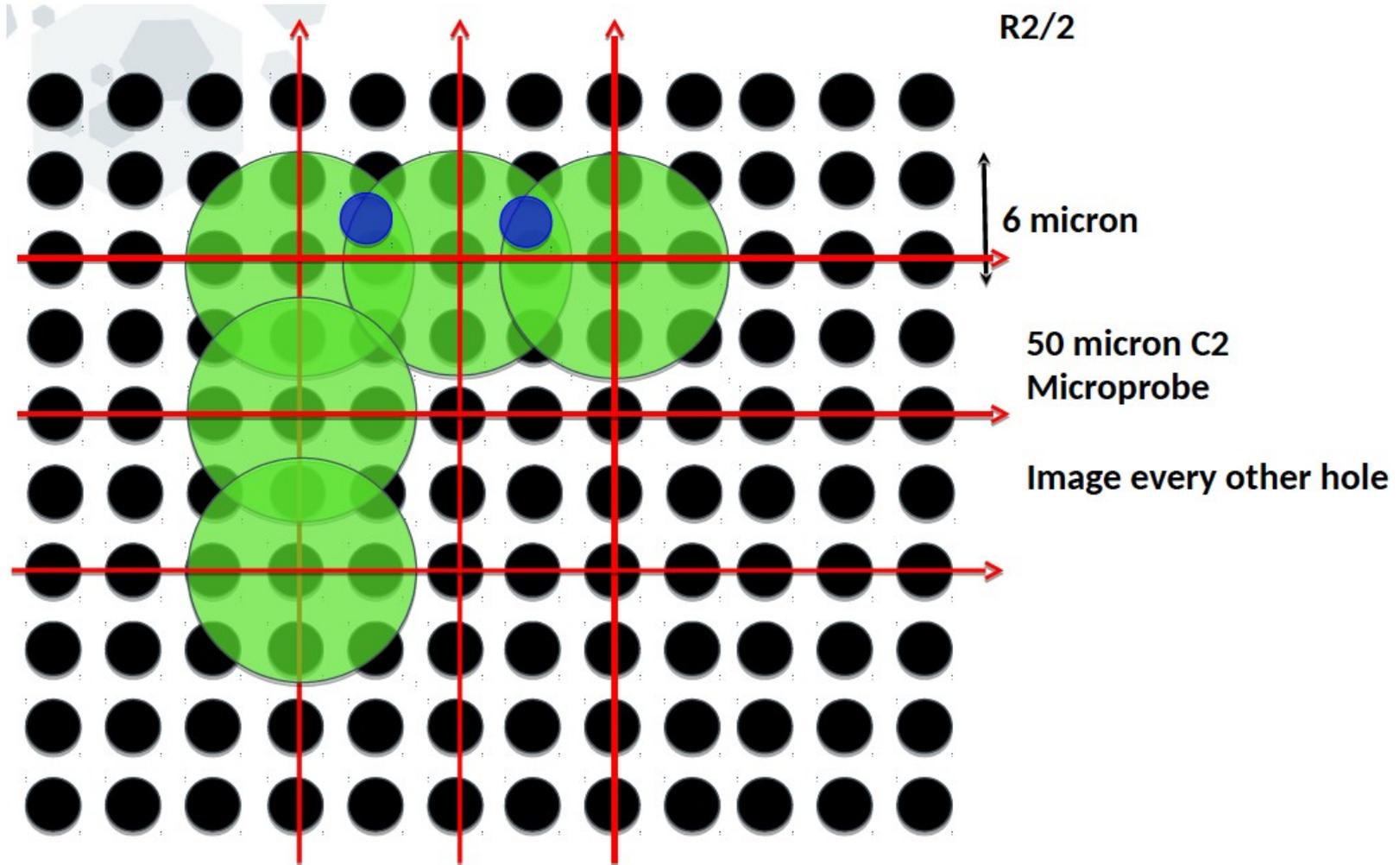
- changing spot size only
- changing magnification only
- changing C2 aperture

While being parallel beam size can only change when:

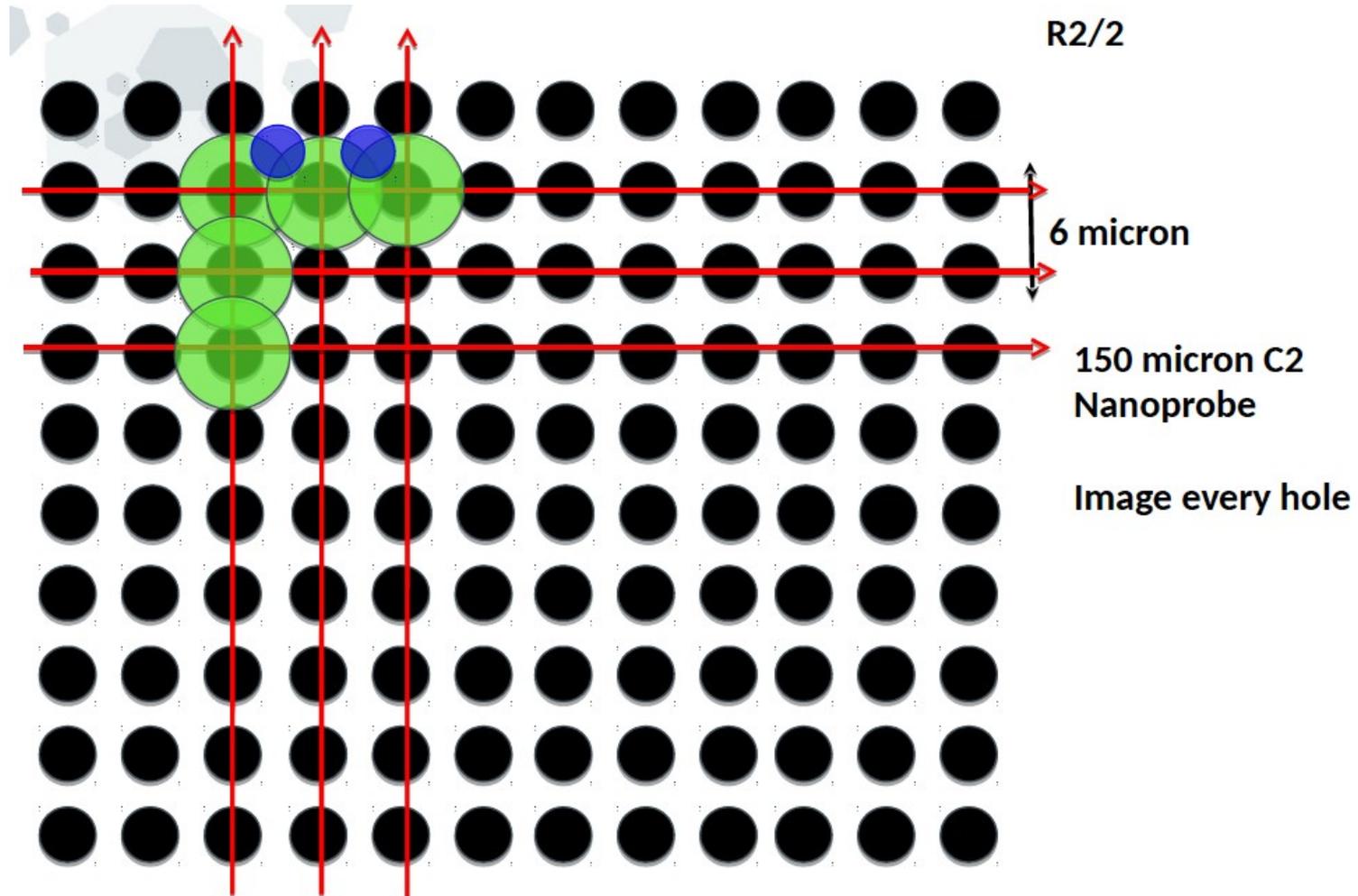
- changing C2 aperture
- and should be consistent (50- \rightarrow 100 micron should be 2x larger beam)
- Beam sizes should be constant for each C2 aperture when:
 - changing spot size
 - changing magnification



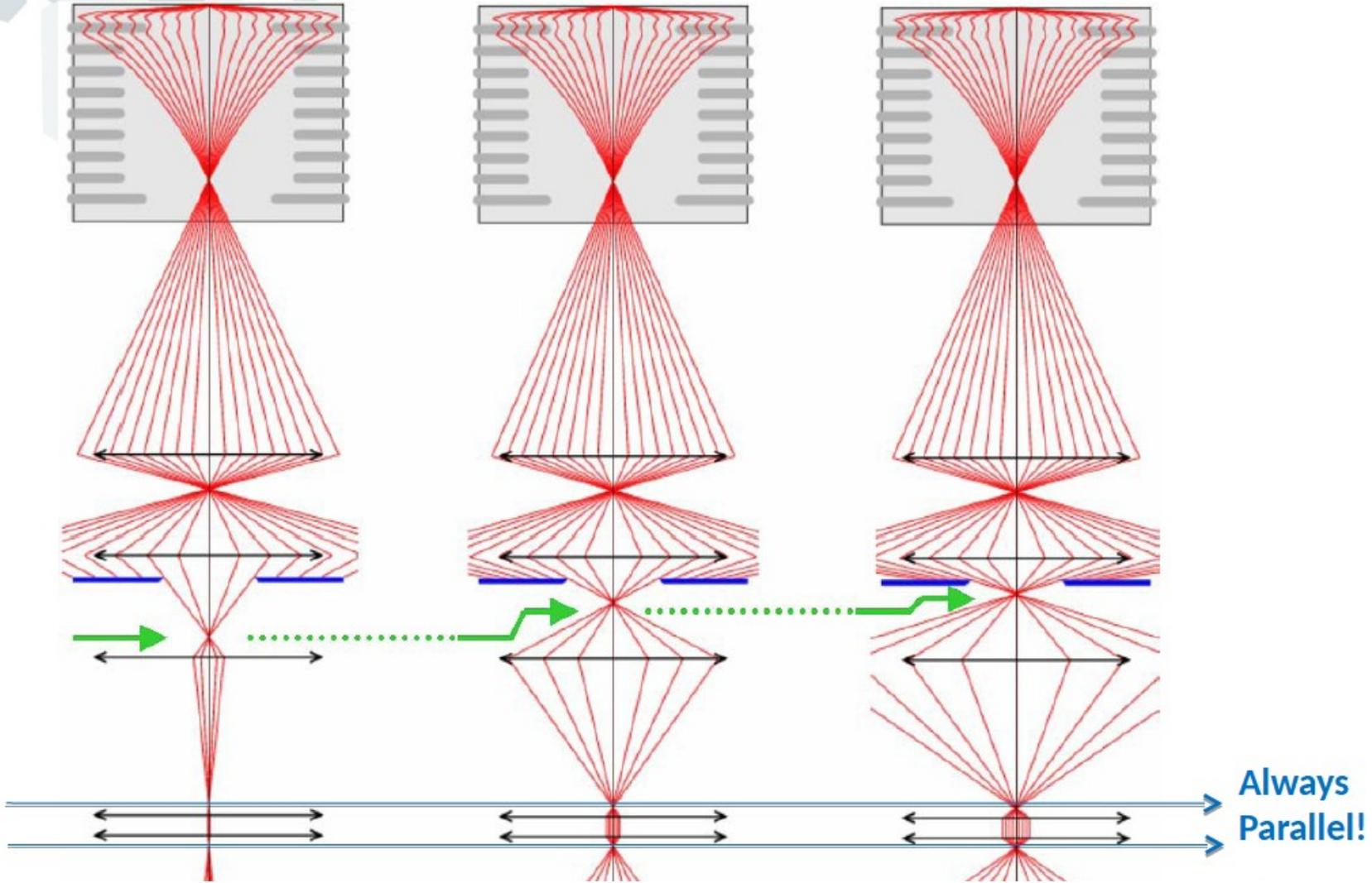
Micro-probe (Glacios)



Nano-probe (Glacios)



3 Condenser zoom system (Titan)

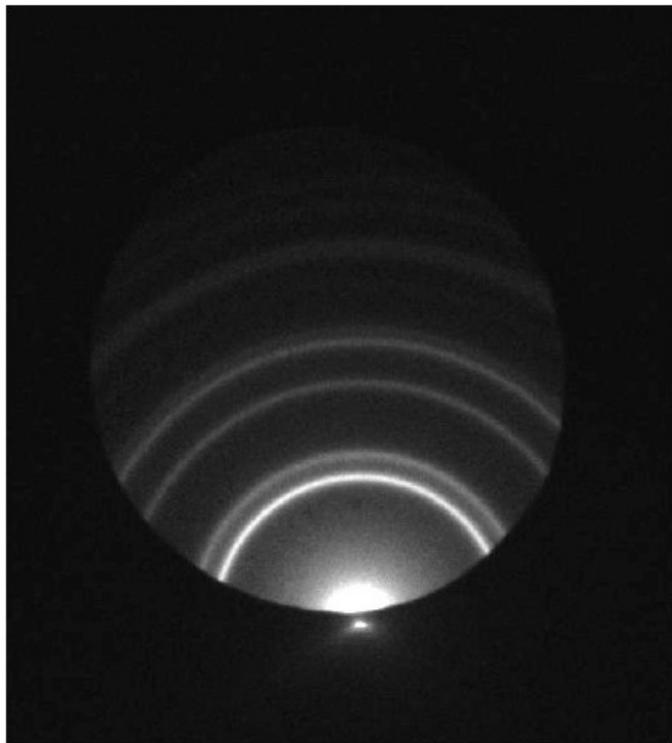


3 Condenser zoom system (Titan)

- Whenever in the parallel range on a titan,
 - pressing eucentric focus
 - inserting objective aperture
 - pressing diffraction

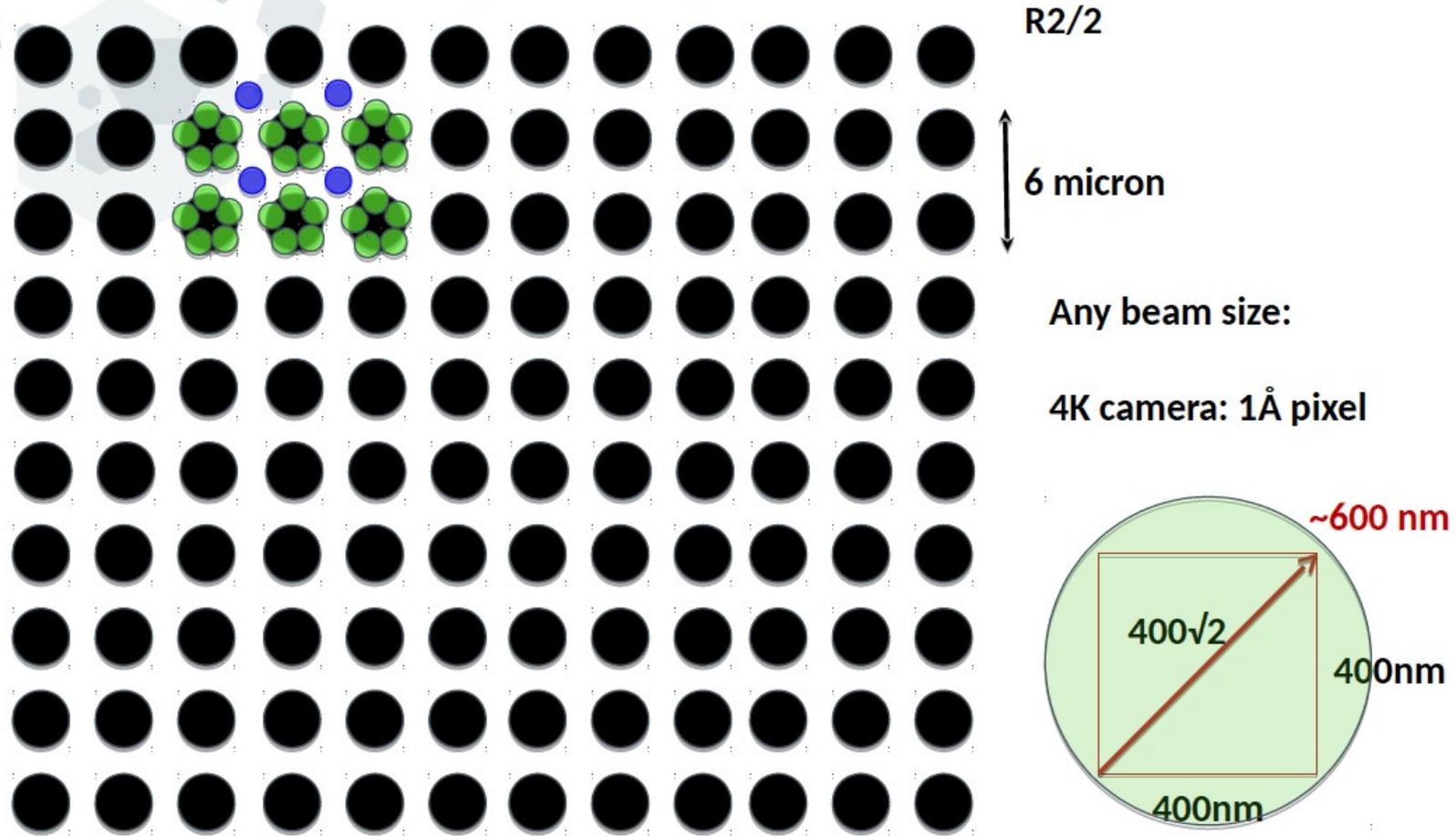
MUST result in the right image! (or very close to)

The image **MUST** remain focused in diffraction AND on the objective aperture when changing intensity and/or spotsize (apart from becoming more intense).



IF NOT: IT DID NOT LEAVE THE FACTORY LIKE THAT!

Nanoprobe (Krios)



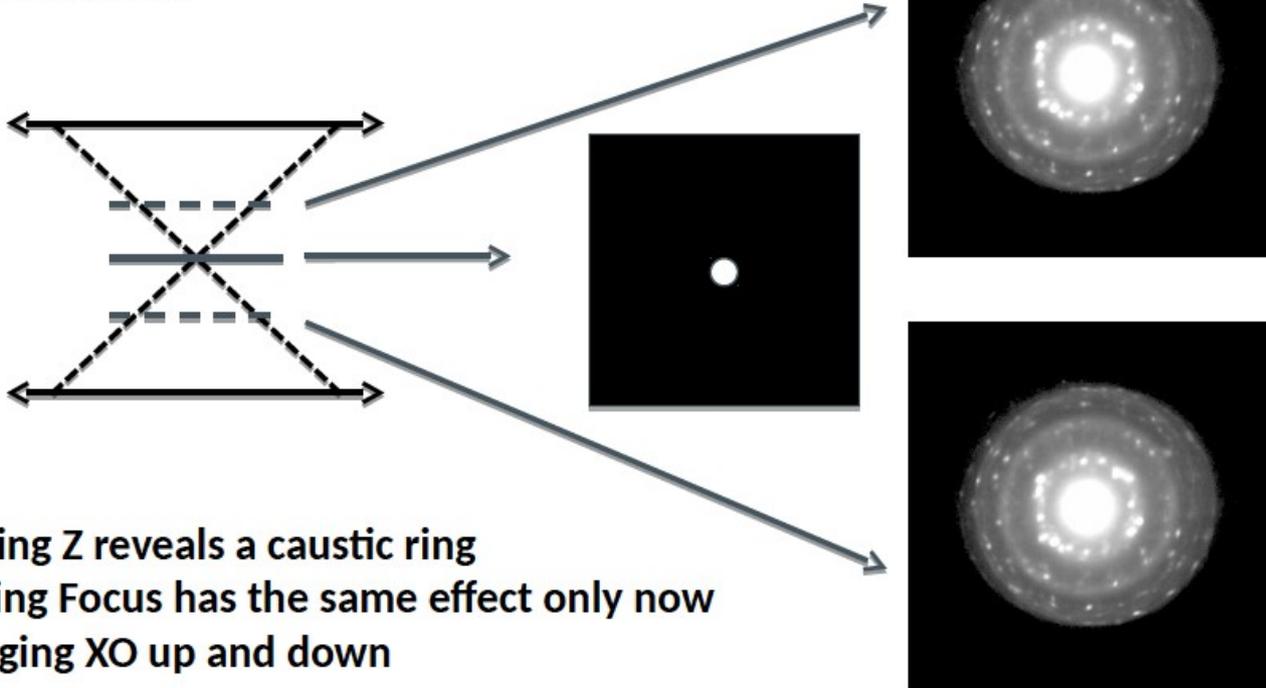
No compromise on dose rate, no wasted area, perfectly parallel,
less strain on grid quality (one good grid square is enough)

Tips and tricks: eucentric

-Press Eucentric focus

-Always set the sample at Eucentric height (ALPHA-wobbler or quick method)

Quick method:



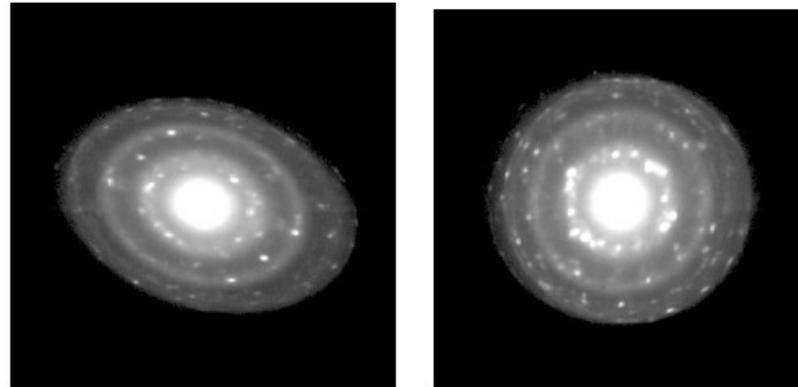
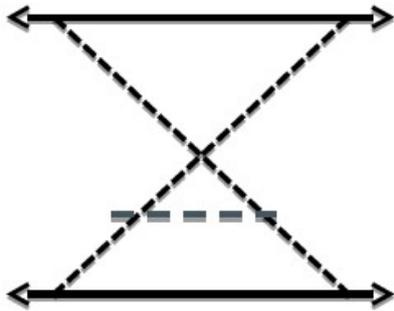
-Moving Z reveals a caustic ring

-Turning Focus has the same effect only now changing XO up and down

Tips and tricks: stigmation

- When at Eucentric height and Eucentric focus lower Z to reveal the caustic
- Adjust the caustic ring to be round with objective stigmator
- Stigmator values should not be larger than 0.1. at intermediate mag 30-60kx it should not be much off from zero!

Quick method:

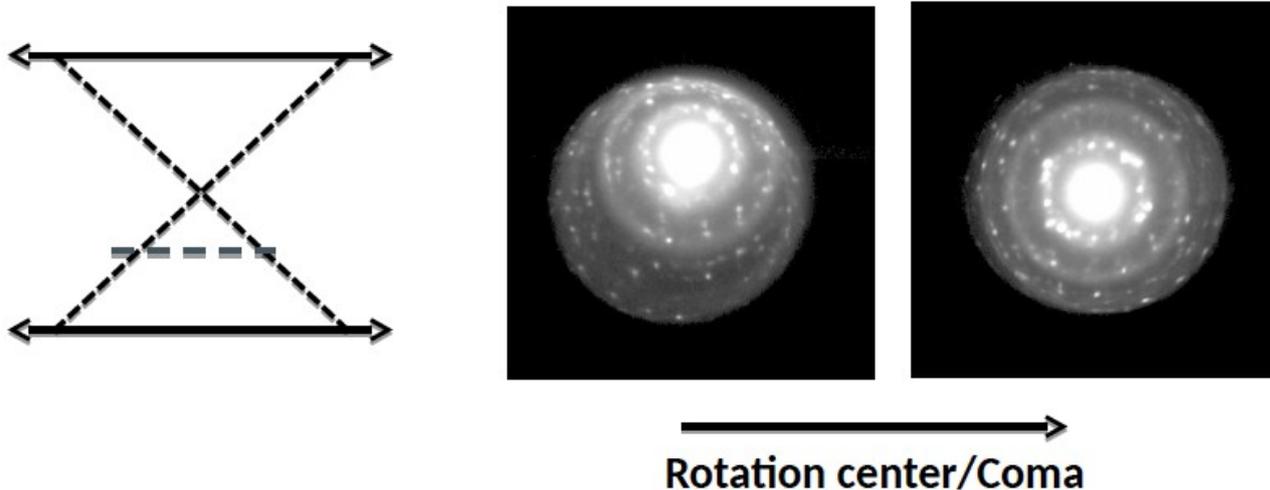


Objective Stigmation

Tips and tricks

- When at Eucentric height and Eucentric focus lower Z to reveal the caustic
- Activate Rotation center and stop the wobbler using the course focus button
- Center the central spot in the middle of the caustic using the MF buttons (rot center)
- Coma free alignment and Rotation center both use the same button! You can not optimize both!

Quick method:



Tips and tricks

- Bring the sample back to Eucentric height with Z-height (caustic back to a spot)
- Check pivot points at Eucentric focus
- Be aware that the PP are focus dependent!
- As for SPA you change the focus the PP will change! (Unavoidable), therefore never correct PP at a specific focus other than Eucentric focus
- Since PP are focus dependent, the beam will move while imaging at different defocus settings! This is not beam instability, it's a fact of life.
- Your parallel beam size should therefore be chosen a bit larger than the size of the diagonal of the camera surface!



Pivot points

How to setup your scope -recap

This should not take more than 15 minutes:

- Determine the desired resolution, sensitivity of the camera: pixelsize
- Pixel size determines the magnification (example 1A on Titan is 60kx), set mag!
- Insert cross-grating
- Press Eucentric Focus (~80% titan, 90% Tecnai)
- Set Eucentric Height using Alpha- wobbler for course and then using a focused spot
- Lower Z Height to show caustic ring
- Center spot in the middle of caustic ring: rotation center
- Make caustic ring round: objective astigmatism
- Bring Z-height back to a spot
- Check Pivot Points



How to setup your scope

Check parallel illumination condition

- Switch to diffraction
- Insert objective aperture
- Focus objective aperture with focus
- Focus diffraction pattern with intensity
- ON A TITAN, simply set the beam size slightly larger than the camera diameter
- then press diffraction and insert objective aperture: BOTH should be focused by definition!

You should now be:

At Eucentric height

At Eucentric focus

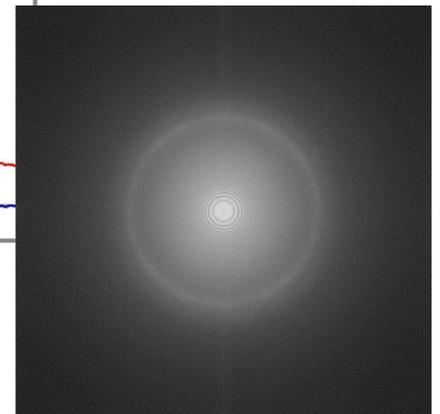
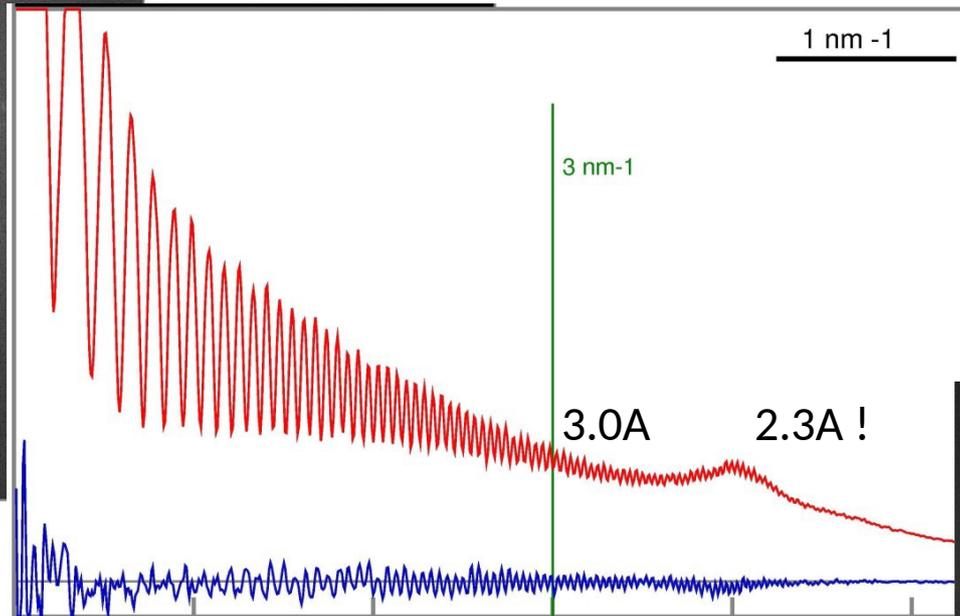
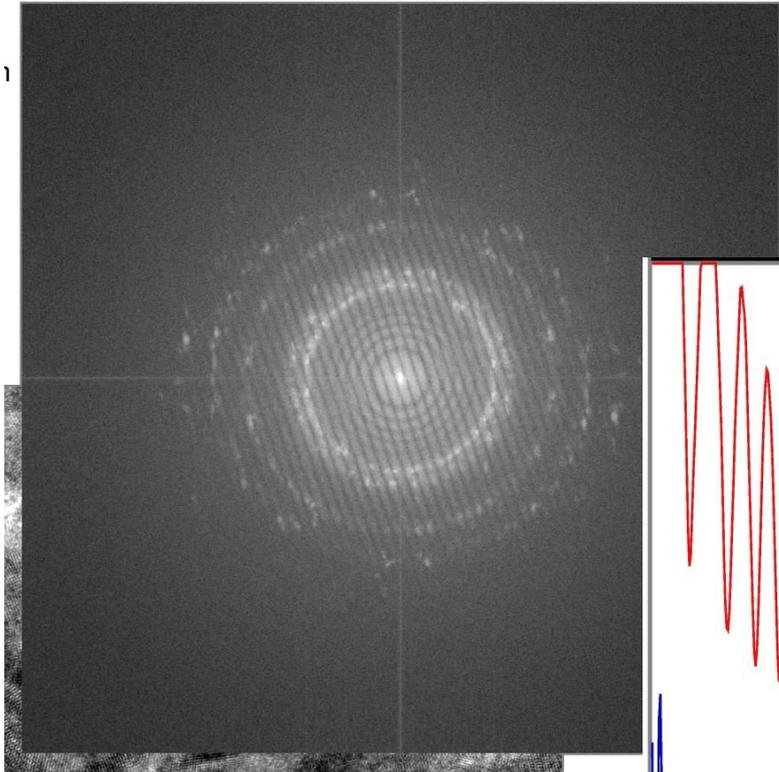
Parallel

Illuminating the detector fully

Roughly stigmated

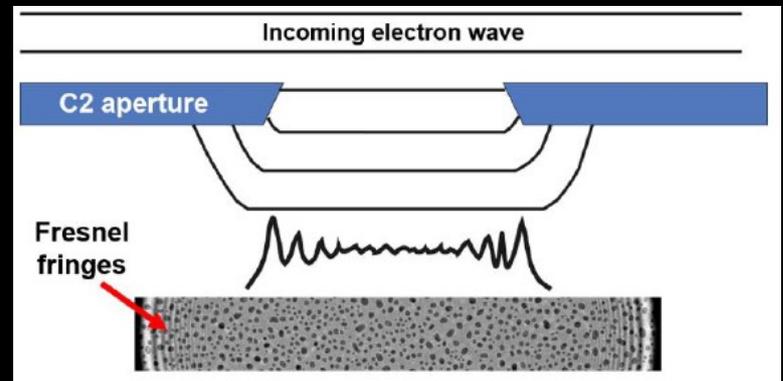
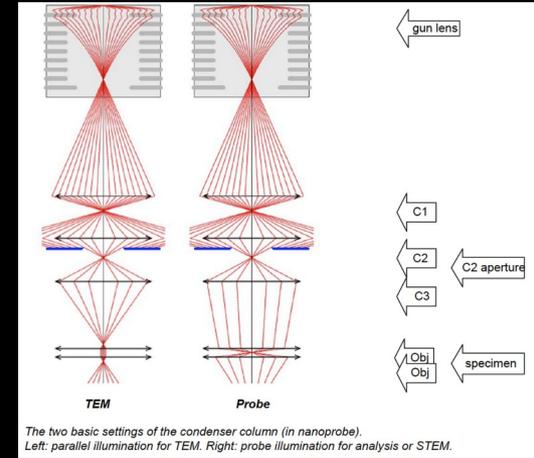
Roughly coma free

And then:
You should see something like this:



Fringe Free Imaging (FFI)

Electron diffraction

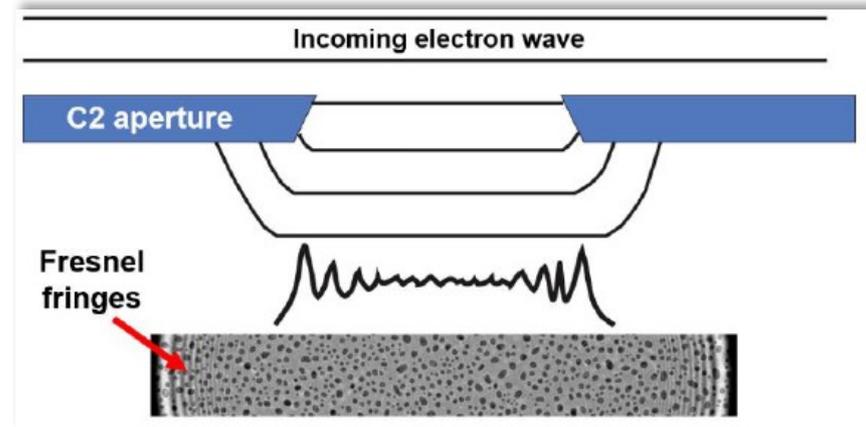
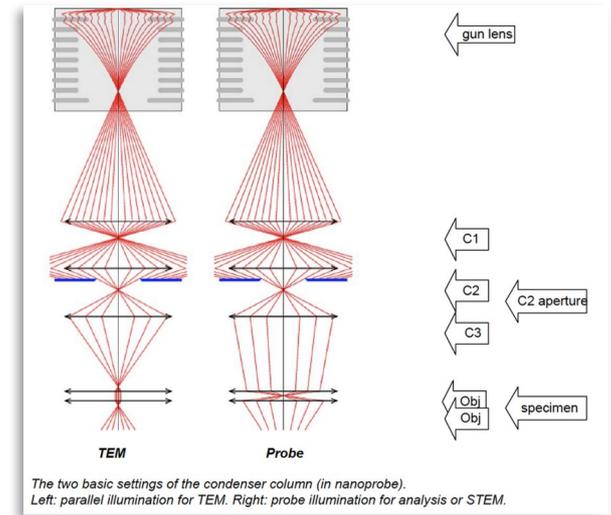


Fringe Free Imaging (FFI)

Electron diffraction

- Electron: wave - particle duality
- Electrons get diffracted through C2 aperture
- Upper pole piece of the objective lens (OBL) produces an image of the C2 aperture.
- This image does not always coincide with the sample plane
- Simultaneous imaging of the focused sample and the out-of-focus C2 aperture by lower pole piece OBL

When the C2 aperture is imaged out-of-focus, wave interference at the edge of the condenser beam appears as Fresnel fringes (see figure bottom left)



B

Without fringe free illumination

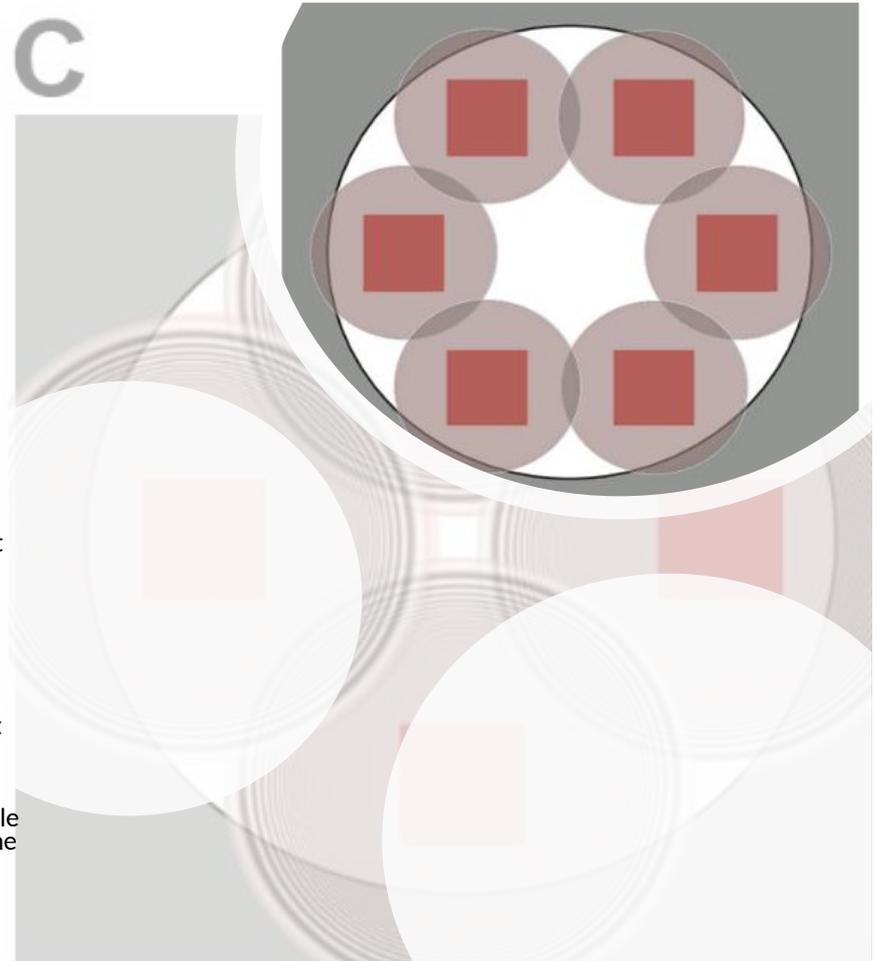
Wave interference => Fresnel fringes

- Fresnel fringes reduce the useful beam area and limit the number of images which can be recorded from a single hole (Fig. C).
- To minimize Fresnel fringes: adjust stage position to bring the specimen to the image plane of the C2-aperture
- The lower OBL pole piece strength is adjusted so that the sample is focused on the camera imaging plane.
- Now both the C2 aperture and the sample will be in focus and no, or very few, Fresnel fringes will be visible in the image recorded by the camera (see figure to the right).

SA120kx rPTEM

Claim is it allows reduction of the beam size and more images can be acquired from a single hole.

C



Wave interference => Fresnel fringes

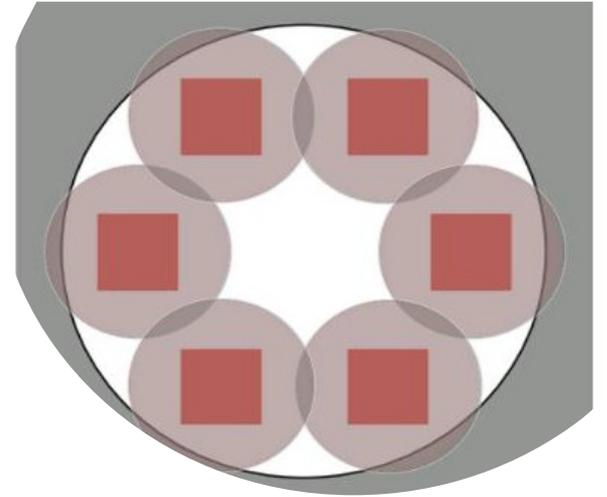
Fresnel fringes reduce the useful beam area and limit the number of images which can be recorded from a single hole (Fig. C).

To minimize Fresnel fringes: adjust stage position to bring the specimen to the image plane of the C2-aperture

The lower OBL pole piece strength is adjusted so that the sample is focused on the camera imaging plane.

Now both the C2 aperture and the sample will be in focus and no, or very few, Fresnel fringes will be visible in the image recorded by the camera (see figure to the right).

Claim is it allows reduction of the beam size and more images can be acquired from a single hole.

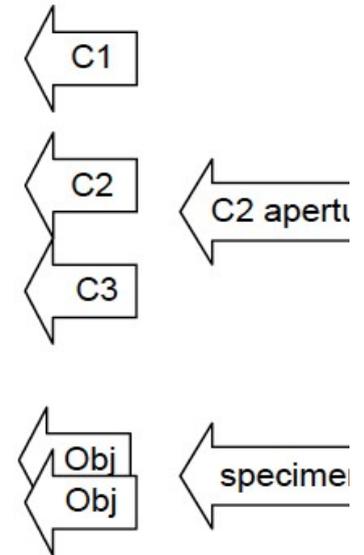


Compatibility

- In theory fringe free imaging (FFI) can be achieved on any microscope by driving the stage motor to change sample height to C2 focus and adjusting the defocus of the sample. However, this means that the sample will no longer be at eucentric height.
- Thermo Fisher Scientific FFI modification is a mechanical stage adjustment where the whole stage is lowered to the required Z-height using stage wedges. The tilt axis and eucentric height are re-tuned to work optimally at that stage location. This allows seamless acquisition of single particle and tomography data with FFI.

TEM

Probe



Left: basic settings of the condenser column (in nanoprobe).

Right: parallel illumination for TEM. Right: probe illumination for analysis or STEM.

TEM system compatibility

- FFI is provided as a standard feature on every Krios G4.
- Earlier Krios models (G1, -2, -3(i)) need to undergo modifications in order to operate in FFI mode.
- On Generation 1 Krios, FFI is only compatible with the plan 3 Autoloader systems.
- The FFI modifications are not provided on Glacios and Arctica TEM systems.
- FFI can only be used in nanoprobe (nP) mode.



FFI installation and calibration

field upgrade

physical adjustment of the stage position

(~60 μm displacement)

Re-alignment of the Autoloader.

Procedure:

nP parallel illumination,

96kx magnification in TEM or 165kx EFTEM

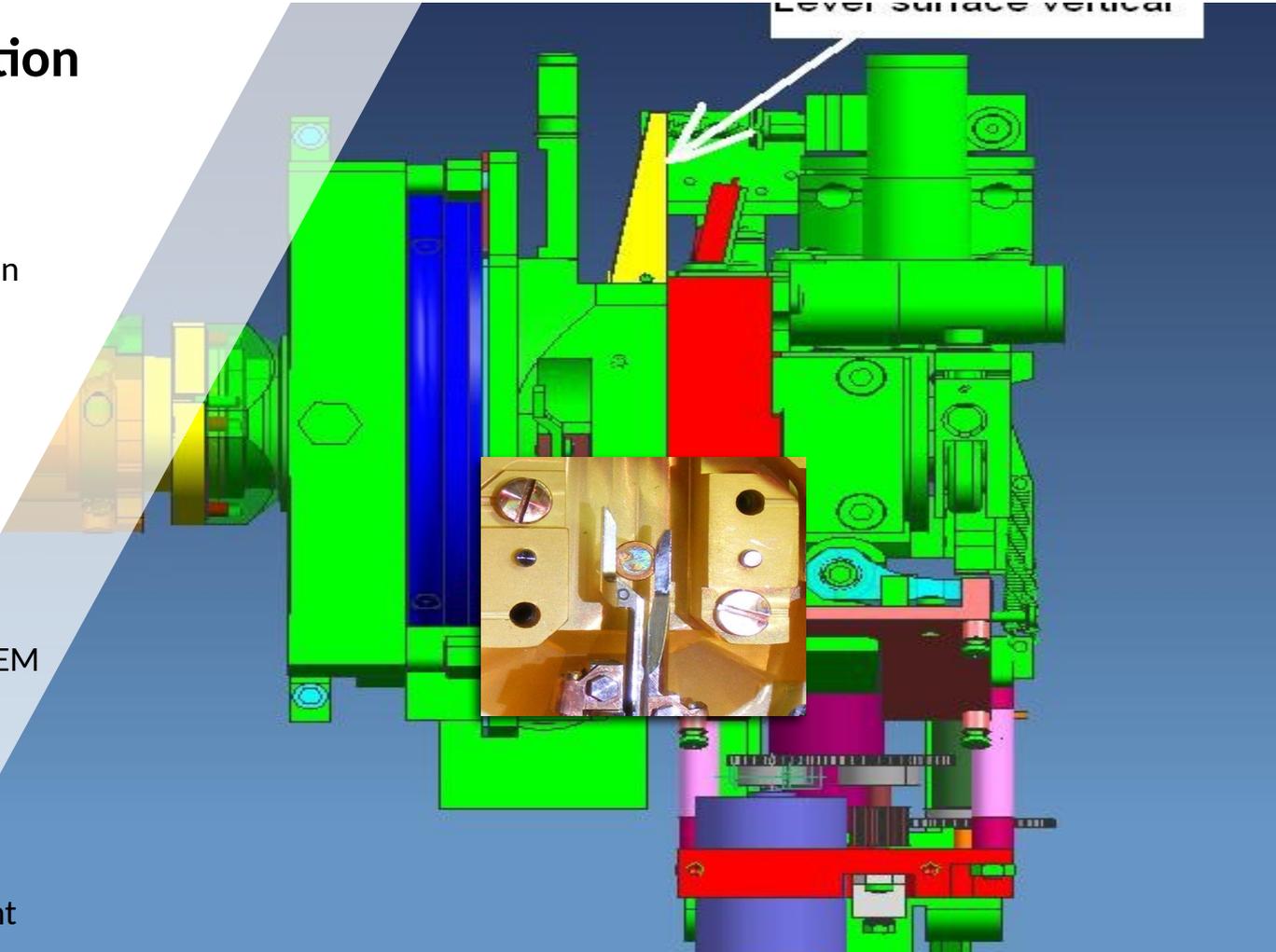
beam diameter set to ~600nm

Objective lens excitation increased

until Fresnel fringes are not visible

Image focused by lowering stage Z-height

Stage wedges adjusted to redefine eucentric height.



Fringe Free illumination

differences when compared to
normal TEM illumination

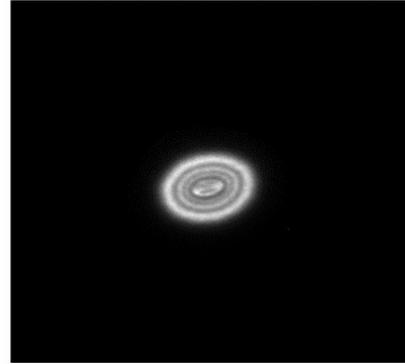
When the stage height is re-adjusted to meet the FFI requirements, the electron beam has a different appearance when condensed to a spot.

It is not as small and round anymore.

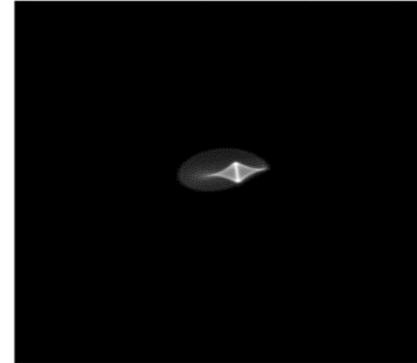
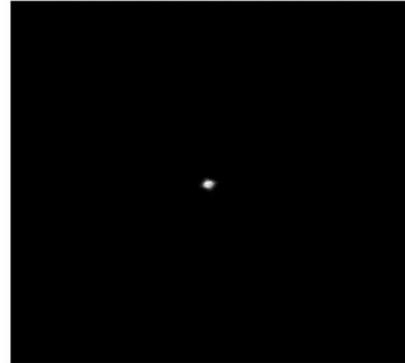
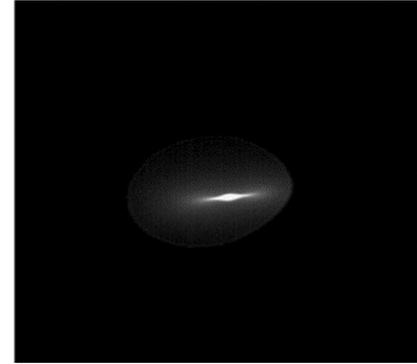
However, the appearance of the beam does not influence the performance of the system in TEM mode.

Condenser astigmatism is now best optimized by adjusting the stigmators to create a round beam in parallel mode, instead of optimizing the spot shape by condensing the beam.

Normal TEM



FFI TEM



Fringe Free illumination

differences cont'ed

Magnification range and defocus

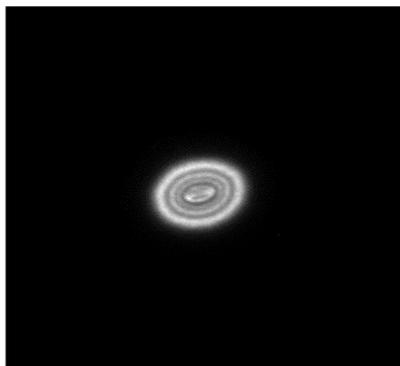
FFI alignments are done at medium-high SA magnifications (96.000x) corresponding to a beam diameter of around ~600 nm.

When the beam diameter is varied by adjusting the condenser lenses, this also affect the focus of the C2 aperture and hence the quality of FFI with just several more fringes appearing in the image.

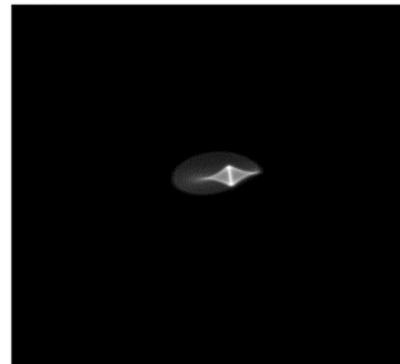
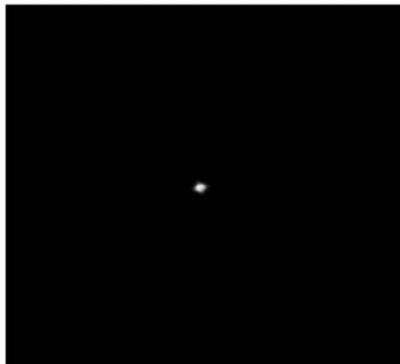
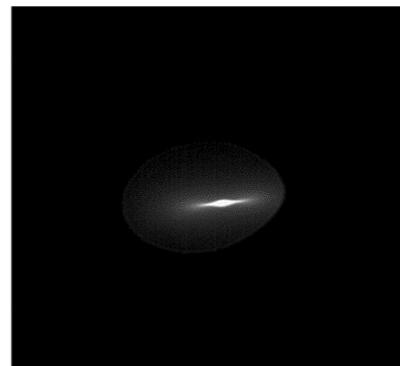
Beam diameter changes are needed when working at different magnifications

This will not limit the use of FFI for magnifications that are typically utilized for SPA experiments with a narrow beam diameter. A similar effect will occur when applying an additional defocus with the objective lens. Such a defocus will change the focus of the C2 aperture and introduce some fringes around the edge of the beam

Normal TEM



FFI TEM



Fringe Free illumination

differences cont'ed

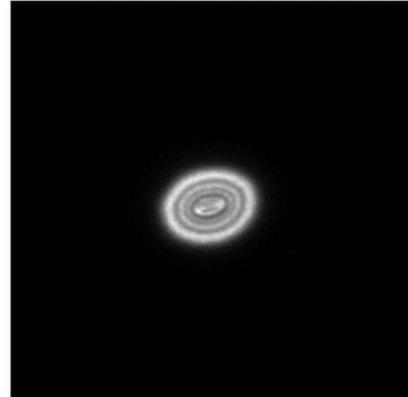
Direct alignments:

On systems with FFI configuration, the recommended way to adjust beam tilt pivot points for TEM experiments is to work with a parallel beam and change the magnification to allow displaying the full beam on the flu cam viewer. Pivot points are then adjusted by minimizing the beam movement during the alignment.

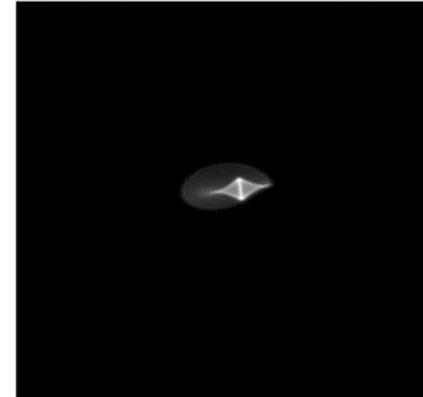
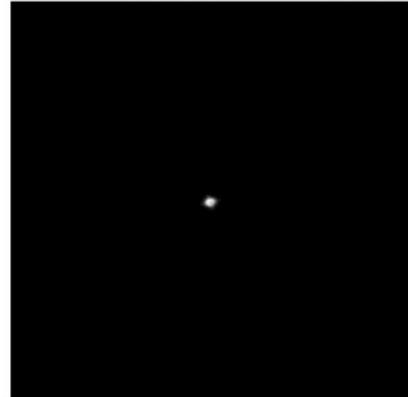
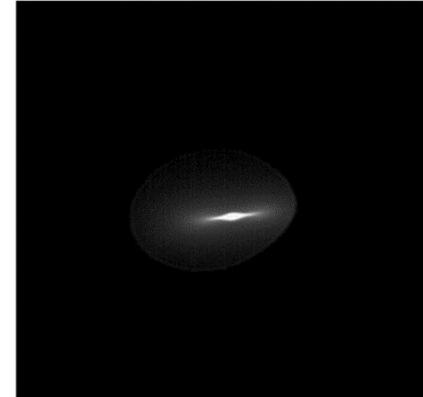
Note:

On systems with an anti-contaminator aperture (e.g., Krios G3i), the beam can be cut-off at low magnifications below 5kx.

Normal TEM



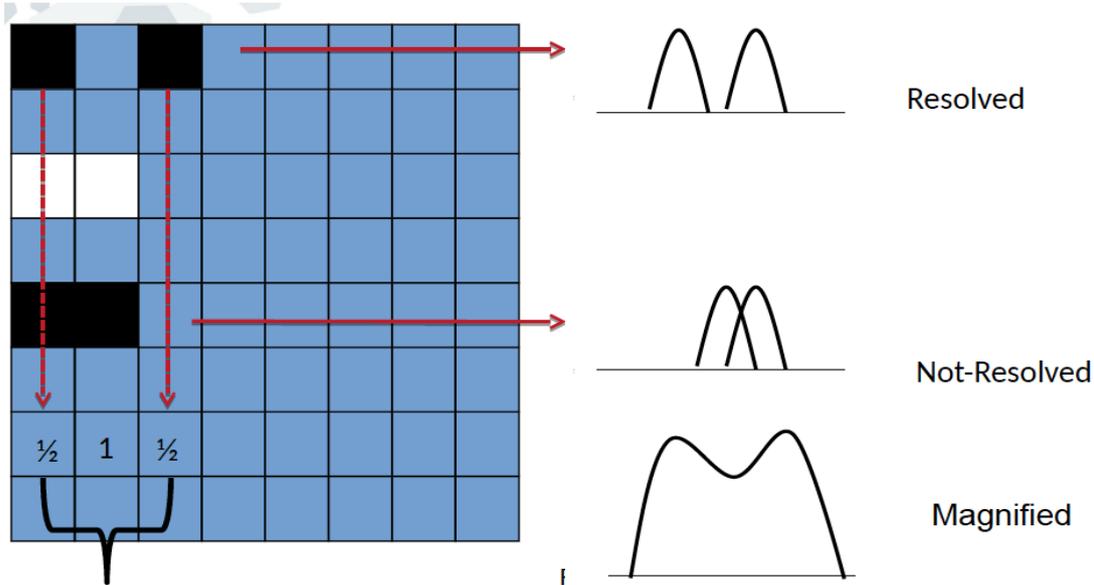
FFI TEM



Next Generation Cryo-TEM hardware



Resolution



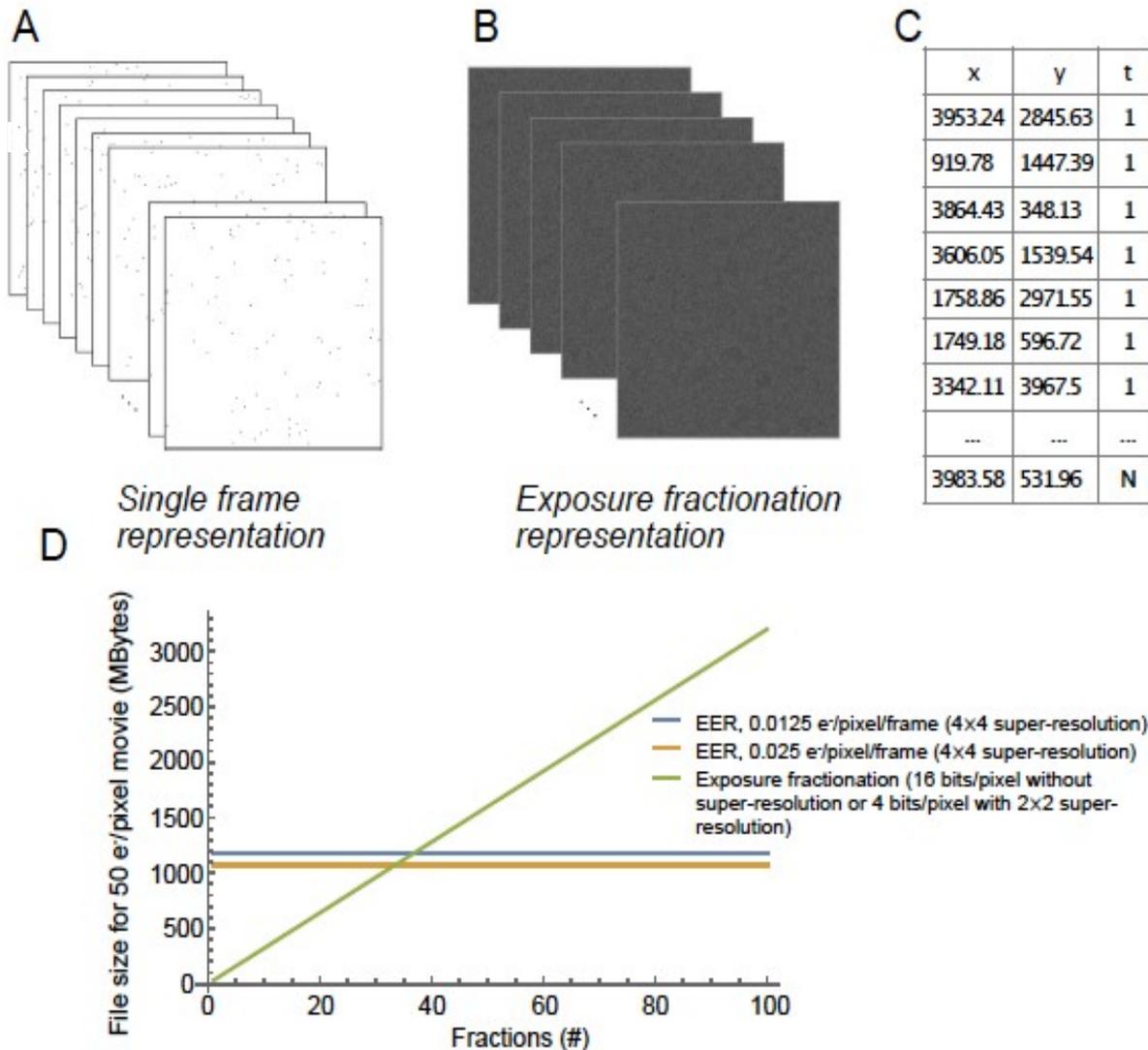
2 pixels = smallest distance to be resolved = Nyquist

Full Nyquist = 1 (normalized) = highest resolution at given magnification

Example: 75000 mag, pix size = 1A :
 $Ny = 2A$, $\frac{1}{2} Ny = 4A$, $\frac{1}{4} Ny = 8A$

Electron Event Representation (EER)

- Conventional representations of cryoEM movies store pixel intensities for each exposure fraction
- In contrast, in EER each electron detection event is recorded as a **tuple** of position and time (x,y,time), indicating where and when the electron was detected on the sensor
- storing EER data removes the need to decide on an exposure fractionation strategy during imaging
- Enables optimal correction of specimen motion.
- In addition, EER files record super resolution information in images, allowing 3D reconstruction beyond the Nyquist frequency.



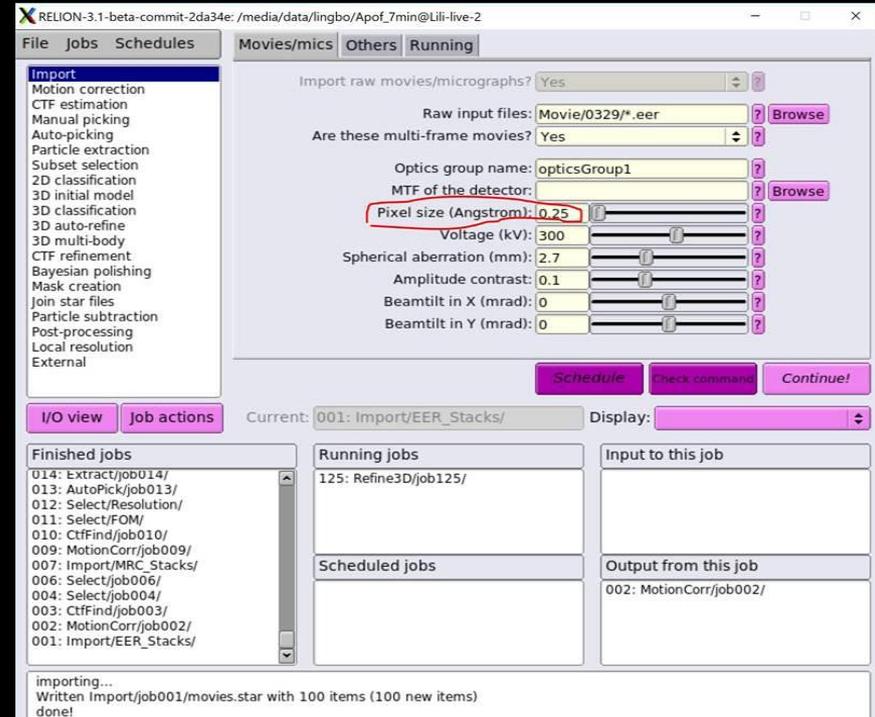
EER data

- EER data is stored as super-resolution.
- So, when importing movies, the input pixel size is half of physical pixel size (reported by EPU).

A separate branch of Relion (Relion-EER) is needed to read .eer files.

Instructions for download and compilation are here:

<https://github.com/3dem/relion/tree/devel-eer>

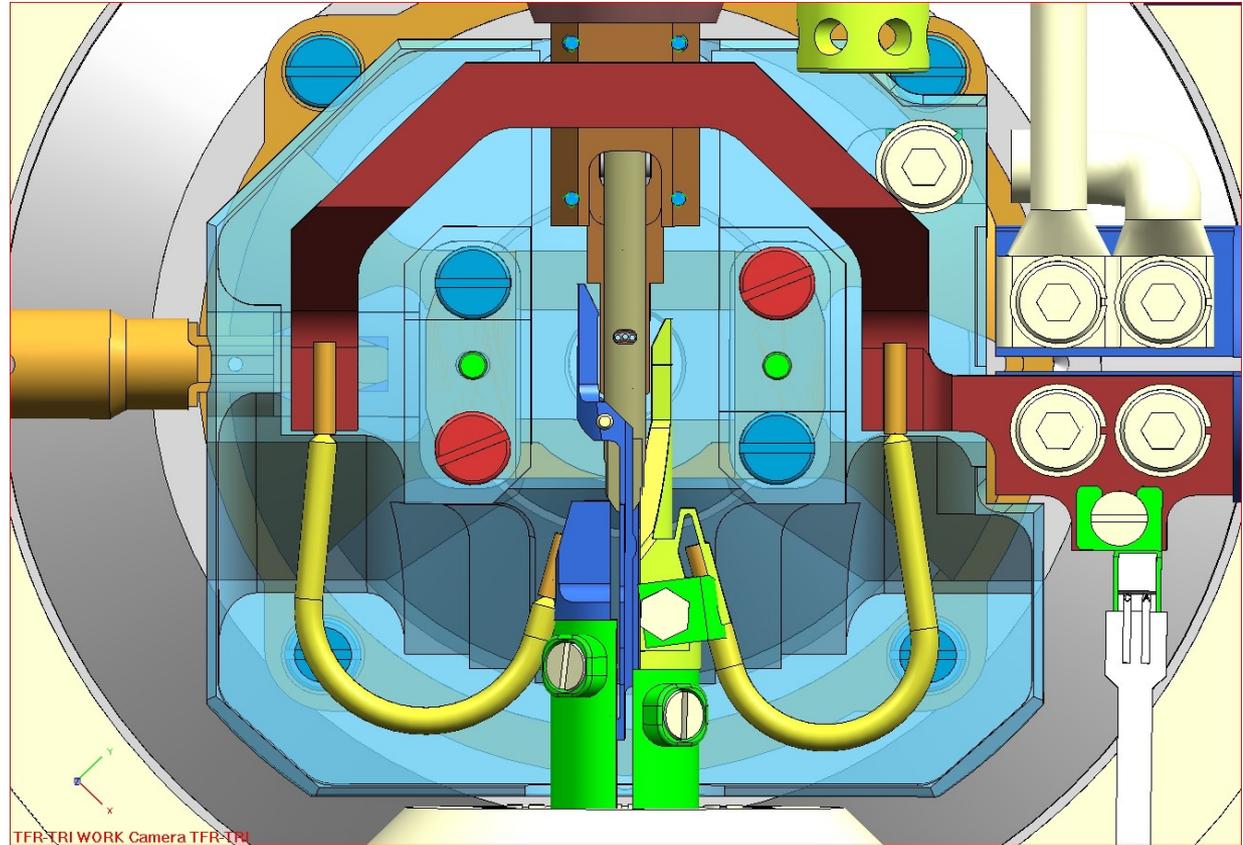


Cryo box design

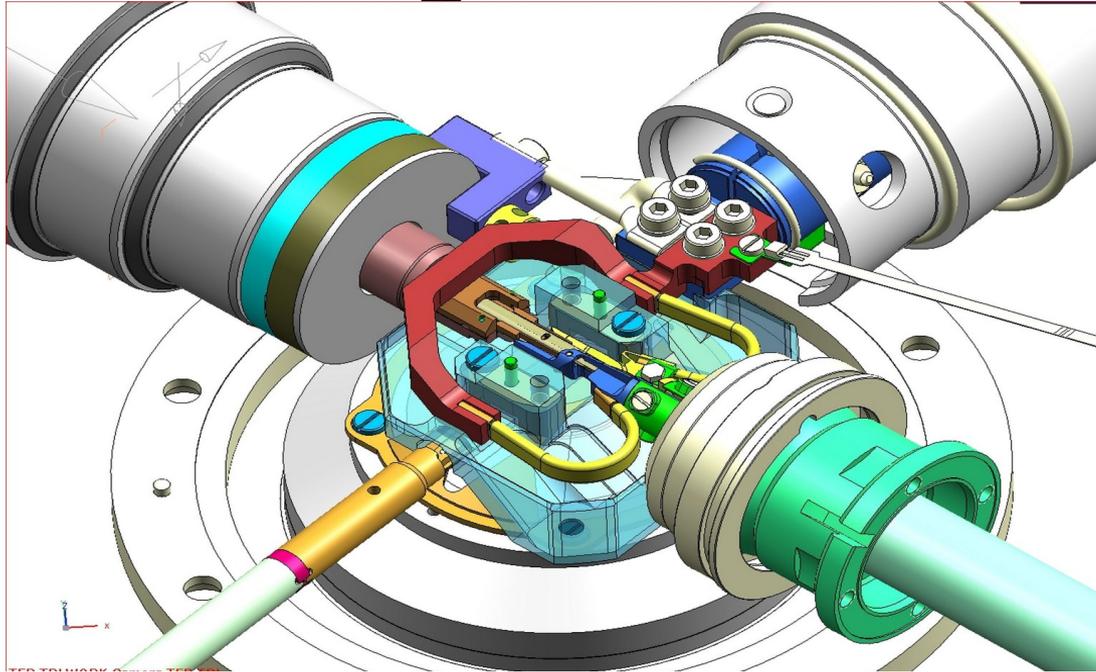
New holder

temp
sensor

obj.
aperture

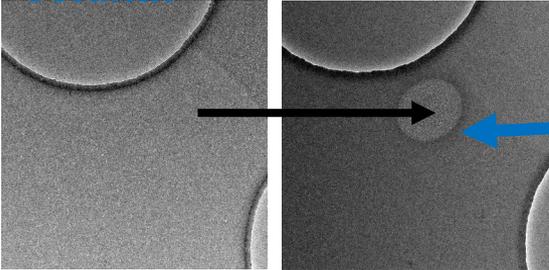


Cryo box design



Sample Quality – Types of contamination

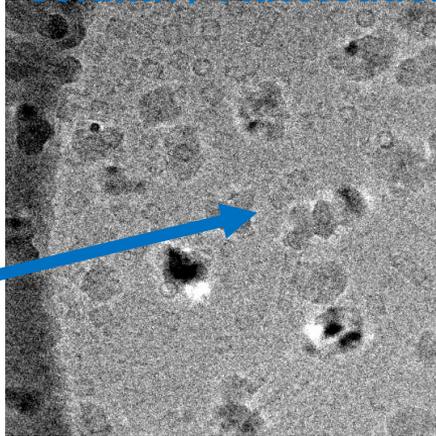
Column



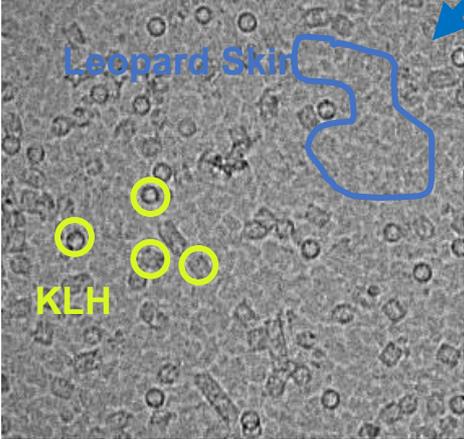
Lifetime

- Ice Growth
- Leopard Skin
- Black Spots

Column / Autoloader



Column / Autoloader

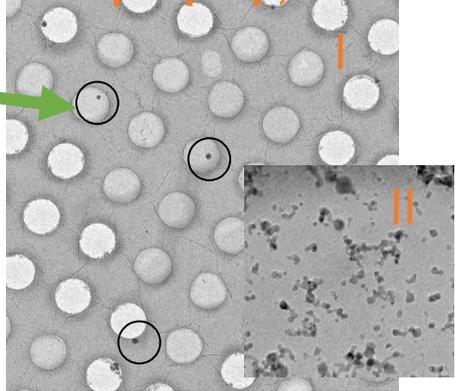


All: surface contamination

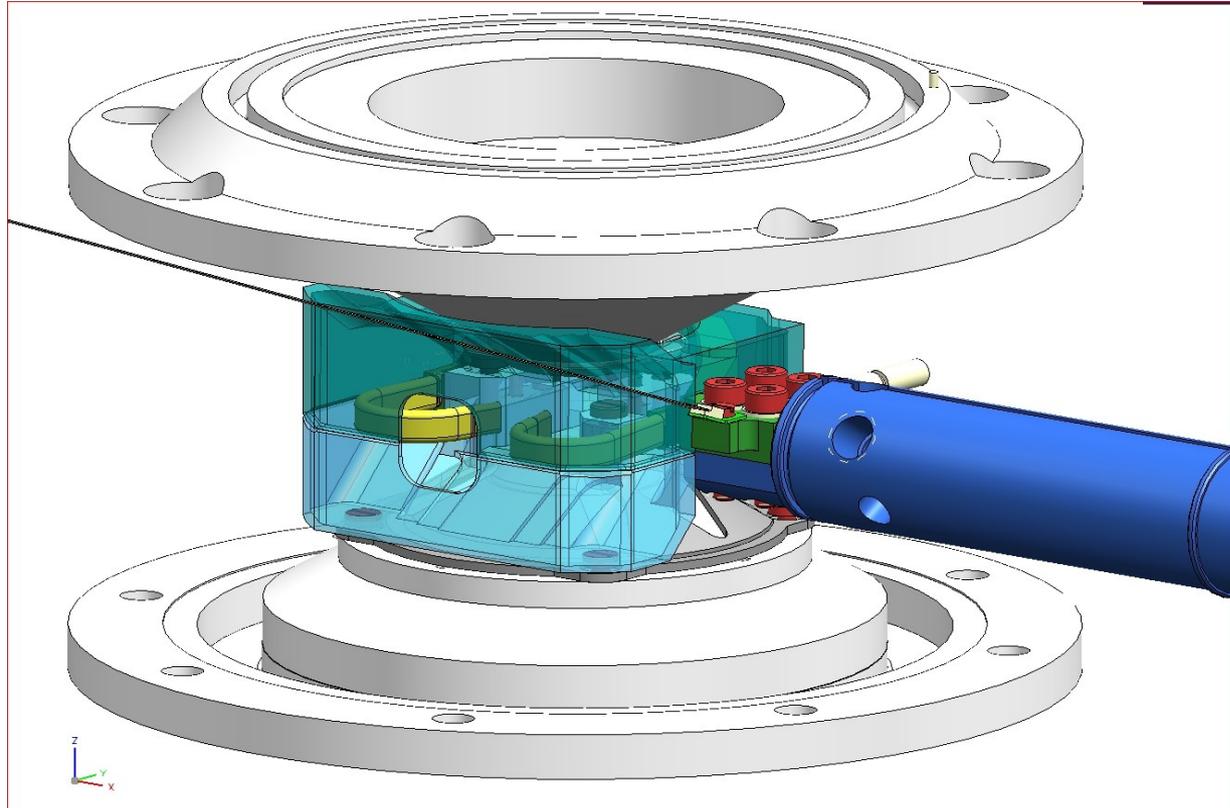
Initial

Transfer Ice I&II

Sample prep, transfer



Cryo box design



Cryo-EM: still cool!

