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Heat release at the wetting front during capillary filling of cellulosic micro-substrates

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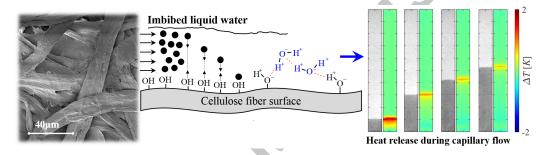
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Abstract



Spontaneous imbibition in cellulosic materials is an expanding field of research due to the direct applicability in paper-based microfluidics. Here, we show experimentally, using simultaneous thermal and optical imaging that the temperature at the wetting front during capillary filling of paper is temporarily increased, even if the imbibed fluid and the cellulosic substrate are initially at isothermal conditions. Several liquids and two types of filter paper, characterised by scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis, were investigated demonstrating a significant temperature rise at the wetting front that cannot be neglected form the process. The temperature rise is found to be related to the energetics of imbibition compounds, including acid-base contributions, that result in electrostatic attractions as the liquid molecules are adhered on the fiber surfaces upon capillary contact.

Keywords: paper-based microfluidics, thermodynamics, capillary dynamics, interfacial energy

1. Introduction

Since their establishment as a medical diagnostic tool [1, 2], paper-based microfluidics received a tremendous attention from physicochemical, biomedical and engineering scientists resulting in a multi-discipline research field that has been regularly reviewed [3–7]. The functionality of such devices is based on the ability of paper as a porous medium to transport liquid spontaneously due to capillary action driven by interfacial energy differences [8], as thermodynamics drives all systems to a lower energy state.

The capillary filling of paper is, however, a complex transport process that involves strong adsorptive interactions at the molecular scale. For substrates that are mainly composed of natural cellulosic fibers [9, 10], this is associated with the interactions between the imbibed fluid

*corresponding author. Tel.: +49 (0) 711 685-62315 Email address: alexandros.terzis@me.com (A. Terzis) and the available cellulose chains which have their free hydroxyl groups (OH⁻) in an equatorial orientation in the glucopyranose rings [11, 12], and hence, readily available for bonding (see cellobiose-inset in Figure 1). The abundance of polar hydroxyls in these regions results in a chemical polarity that can even align cellulosic derivatives when exposed to an electric field [13–15] while measurements of surface energy evidenced that cellulose fibers are biased towards an electron-donor behaviour [16–20]. That is why cellulose, similar to silica surfaces [21], can be used as a strong adsorbent material [22–24].

At the micro-scale, during capillary filling of paper, a precursor liquid film [25] has been shown to move slightly ahead of the wetting bulk phase onto the fiber surfaces forming a kind of liquid slippage [26]. This is believed to have a direct relation to wettability [27] and depends on the mobility of the first adsorbent liquid-layer molecules that occupy the low energy positions of the solid [28, 29]. For short range forces, and based on electron transfer the-

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