



# MOLECULAR BEAMS

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## PREFACE

MOLECULAR-BEAM experiments have for many years been among the most fruitful sources of fundamental information about molecules, atoms, and nuclei. Some of the early experiments provided direct experimental evidence for spatial quantization and for the spin of the electron. More recent experiments have led to such important discoveries as the anomalous magnetic moments of protons and neutrons, the deuteron quadrupole moment with its implication of a nucleon tensor interaction, the Lamb shift in the fine structure of atomic hydrogen with its quantum electrodynamic implications, the anomalous magnetic moment of the electron, the existence of nuclear octupole moments, and many others. In addition molecular-beam experiments have produced a wealth of molecular, atomic, and nuclear data including an array of nuclear spin, magnetic moment, and quadrupole moment determinations which, among other things, have provided much of the initial evidence for nuclear shell models.

Despite the scientific importance of the subject, there have been remarkably few books on molecular beams. As discussed in Chapter I, a few review articles and brief monographs have been written but only one detailed book has been published. That book, by R. Fraser (FRA 31), was written twenty-five years ago, prior to almost all of the important discoveries listed in the preceding paragraph.

It is my hope that this book will satisfy the need for a detailed, consistent, and up-to-date discussion of the subject of molecular beams. Although the entire subject is discussed in the present book, experiments prior to 1930 are dealt with more briefly since they are described in greater detail in Fraser's book (FRA 31).

I wish to express my appreciation to the many workers with molecular beams who have supplied me with information and help in the preparation of this book. Special thanks are due to Professors I. I. Rabi, P. Kusch, and J. R. Zacharias and to Drs. H. Kolsky and H. Lew. I should also like to thank John Wiley & Sons for their permission to use some material, especially in Chapter III, from my book on *Nuclear Moments* published by them, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for the fellowship I held at Oxford University during the

completion of this book. Finally, I wish to express special appreciation to my wife, Elinor Ramsey, for her help in making available the time during which the book was written, and to my secretary, Phyllis Brown, for her extensive and excellent help in the preparation of the manuscript.

N. F. R.

*Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
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# CONTENTS

## I. MOLECULAR AND ATOMIC BEAMS

1. Introduction	1
2. Typical Molecular-beam Experiment	2
3. Kinds of Molecular-beam Measurements	8

## II. GAS KINETICS

1. Molecular Effusion from Sources	11
1.1 Effusion from thin-walled apertures	11
1.2. Effusion from long channels	13
2. Molecular-beam Intensities and Shapes	16
2.1. Beam intensities	16
2.2. Beam shapes	16
3. Velocities in Molecular Beams	19
3.1. Velocity distribution in a volume of gas	19
3.2. Velocity distribution in molecular beams	20
3.3. Characteristic velocities	20
3.4. Experimental measurements of molecular velocities	21
4. Molecular Scattering in Gases	25
4.1. Methods of measurement	25
4.2. Calculation of scattering cross-sections from attenuation measurements	28
4.3. Cross-section theory	30
4.4. Results of atomic-beam scattering experiments	33
5. Interaction of Molecular Beams with Solid Surfaces	35
5.1. Introduction	35
5.2. Reflection	35
5.3. Diffraction	38
5.4. Inelastic collisions	44
6. Molecular-beam Studies of Chemical Equilibria, Ionization Potentials, and Optical and Microwave Spectroscopy	47
6.1. Chemical equilibria	47
6.2. Ionization and excitation	48
6.3. Optical and microwave absorption spectroscopy	50

## III. INTERACTION OF A NUCLEUS WITH ATOMIC AND MOLECULAR FIELDS

1. Introduction	51
2. Electrostatic Interaction	52
2.1. Multipole expansion	52
2.2. Theoretical restrictions on electric multipole orders	58
2.3. Nuclear electric quadrupole interactions	59
2.4. Multipole moments of arbitrary order	66



3. Magnetic Interaction	68
3.1. Magnetic multipoles	68
3.2. Magnetic dipoles	72
3.3. Magnetic dipole interactions with internal and external magnetic fields	76
3.4. Magnetic interactions in molecules	80
4. Intermediate Coupling	83
4.1. Introduction	83
4.2. Solution of secular equation	84
4.3. Perturbation theory	87
IV. NON-RESONANCE MEASUREMENTS OF ATOMIC AND NUCLEAR MAGNETIC MOMENTS	
1. Deflexion and Intensity Relations	89
1.1. Effective magnetic moment	89
1.2. Deflexion of molecule by magnetic fields	90
2. Deflexion Measurements of Atomic Magnetic Moments	100
3. Deflexion Measurements of Nuclear and Rotational Magnetic Moments in Non-paramagnetic Molecules	102
4. Atomic-beam Deflexion Measurements of Nuclear Moments	104
5. Atomic-beam Zero-moment Method for Nuclear Moments	107
6. Atomic-beam Refocusing Method for Nuclear Moments	111
7. Atomic-beam Measurements of Signs of Nuclear Moments	113
8. Atomic-beam Space Focusing Measurements of Nuclear Spins	114
V. MOLECULAR-BEAM MAGNETIC RESONANCE METHODS	
1. Introduction	115
2. Magnetic Resonance Method	116
3. Transition Probabilities	118
3.1. Transition probability for individual molecules	118
3.2. Transition probability averaged over velocity distribution	123
4. Magnetic Resonance Method with Separated Oscillating Fields	124
4.1. Introduction	124
4.2. Transition probability for individual molecule with separated oscillating fields	127
4.3. Separated oscillating fields transition probability averaged over velocity distribution	128
4.4. Phase shifts in the molecular-beam method of separated oscillating fields	131
5. Magnetic Resonance with Focused Beams, with Very Slow Molecules, and with Wide Beams	134
5.1. Space focused beams	134
5.2. Beams of very slow molecules. Wide beams	138
6. Distortions of Molecular-beam Resonances	139

<b>VI. NUCLEAR AND ROTATIONAL MAGNETIC MOMENTS</b>	
1. Resonance Measurements of Nuclear Magnetic Moments	145
2. Interpretation with Rotating Coordinate System	146
2.1. Introduction	146
2.2. Classical theory	147
2.3. Quantum theory	151
3. Spins Greater than One-half	153
4. Signs of Nuclear Moments	155
5. Absolute Values of Nuclear Moments	158
6. Nuclear Magnetic Moment Measurements	159
7. Magnetic Shielding	162
8. Molecular Rotational Magnetic Moments	166
8.1. Experimental measurements of rotational magnetic moments	166
8.2. Theory of rotational magnetic moments	169
9. Results of Nuclear Moment Measurements	170
9.1. Introduction	170
9.2. Nuclear moment tables	171
10. Significance of Nuclear Spin and Nuclear Magnetic Moment Results	171
10.1 Introduction	171
10.2. Relations between nuclear statistics, spins, and mass numbers	178
10.3. Nucleon magnetic moments	179
10.4. Deuteron magnetic moment	179
10.5. $H^3$ and $He^3$ magnetic moments	180
10.6. Systematics of nuclear spins and magnetic moments	181
10.7. Nuclear models	184
<b>VII. NEUTRON-BEAM MAGNETIC RESONANCE</b>	
1. Introduction	189
2. Polarized Neutron Beams	189
2.1. Neutron beams	189
2.2. Polarization of neutron beams	190
3. Neutron Magnetic Moment	195
<b>VIII. NUCLEAR AND MOLECULAR INTERACTIONS IN FREE MOLECULES</b>	
1. Introduction	202
2. Nuclear and Rotational Magnetic Moments	203
3. Nuclear Spin-Spin Magnetic Interactions	204
3.1. Direct spin-spin magnetic interaction	204
3.2. Electron-coupled interactions between nuclear spins in molecules	206
4. Spin-rotational Magnetic Interactions	208
5. Nuclear Electrical Quadrupole Interaction	213
6. Diamagnetic Interactions	228
7. Effects of Molecular Vibration	230
8. Combined Hamiltonian	233

9. Matrix Elements and Intermediate Couplings	234
10. Interactions in Molecular Hydrogens	238
11. Molecular Polymerization	239

## IX. ATOMIC MOMENTS AND HYPERFINE STRUCTURES

1. Introduction	241
2. Absolute Scale for Nuclear Moments. The Fundamental Constants	245
3. Nuclear Spins from Atomic Hyperfine Structure	249
4. Atomic Hyperfine Structure Separations for $J = \frac{1}{2}$	251
5. Atomic Magnetic Moments; The Anomalous Electron Moment	256
5.1. Atomic magnetic moments	256
5.2. The anomalous electron magnetic moment	262
6. Hyperfine Structure of Atomic Hydrogen	263
6.1. Atomic hydrogen experiments	263
6.2. Theoretical interpretation of atomic-hydrogen experiments	267
7. Direct Nuclear Moment Measurements with Atoms	270
8. Quadrupole Interactions	271
9. Magnetic Octupole Interactions	277
10. Anomalous Hyperfine Structure and Magnetic-moment Ratios for Isotopes	279
11. Frequency Standards and Atomic Clocks	283
12. Atomic-beam Resonance Method for Excited States	285

## X. ELECTRIC DEFLEXION AND RESONANCE EXPERIMENTS

1. Introduction	287
2. Molecular Interactions in an Electric Field	289
2.1. Molecular Hamiltonian	289
2.2. Energy of vibrating rotator	290
2.3. Stark effect	292
2.4. Hyperfine structure interactions	293
3. Electric Deflexion Experiments	296
4. Electric Resonance Experiments	298
4.1. Introduction	298
4.2. Electric resonance experiments for molecules with negligible hyperfine structure interactions	301
4.3. Electric resonance experiments with hyperfine structure	303
4.4. Electric resonance experiments with change of $J$	307
5. Molecular Amplifier	309

## XI. NUCLEAR ELECTRIC QUADRUPOLE MOMENTS

1. Introduction	310
2. Nuclear Electric Quadrupole Interactions	310
2.1. Nuclear quadrupole interactions in molecules	310
2.2. Nuclear quadrupole interactions in atoms	310

3. Electric-field Gradients	313
3.1. Electric-field gradients in atoms	313
3.2. Electric-field gradients in molecules	315
3.3. Effect of atomic core on nuclear quadrupole interaction	316
4. Nuclear Electric Quadrupole Moments	319
5. Theoretical Interpretation of Nuclear Quadrupole Moments	319
5.1. Theory of deuteron quadrupole moment	319
5.2. Theories of quadrupole moments of complex nuclei	323
 XII. ATOMIC FINE STRUCTURE	
1. Introduction	327
2. Hydrogen Atomic-beam Method	329
3. Hydrogen and Deuterium Results	331
4. Fine Structure of Singly-ionized Helium	336
5. Theoretical Interpretation	340
 XIII. MOLECULAR-BEAM DESIGN PRINCIPLES	
1. Introduction	346
2. Formulae Useful in Design of Molecular-beam Experiments	347
3. Design Considerations	351
3.1. Optimum collimator position	351
3.2. Beam widths, heights, and lengths	352
4. Design Illustration	354
 XIV. MOLECULAR-BEAM TECHNIQUES	
1. Introduction	361
2. Sources	361
2.1. Sources for non-condensable gases	361
2.2. Heated ovens	364
2.3. Sources for dissociated atoms	372
3. Detectors	374
3.1. Miscellaneous detectors	374
3.2. Surface ionization detectors	379
3.3. Electrometers, mass spectrometers, and electron multiplier tubes	381
3.4. Electron bombardment ionizer	387
3.5. Stern-Pirani detector	389
3.6. Radioactivity detection	393
4. Deflecting and Uniform Fields	394
4.1. Stern-Gerlach and Hamburg deflecting fields	394
4.2. The Rabi deflecting field	395
4.3. The two-wire deflecting field	397
4.4. Two-wire deflecting fields from iron magnets	399
4.5. Uniform magnetic fields	401
4.6. Electrostatic fields	402
4.7. Focusing fields	404

5. Oscillatory Fields	407
5.1. Oscillators	407
5.2. Oscillatory field loops and electrodes	407
6. Vacuum System and Mechanical Design	410
7. Miscellaneous Components	415
8. Alignment	415
8.1. Optical alignment	415
8.2. Alignment with beam	416
APPENDIXES	
A. Fundamental Constants	418
B. Vector and Tensor Relations	419
C. Quadrupole Interaction	421
D. Table of Velocity-averaged Functions	425
E. Majorana Formula	427
F. Theory of Two-wire Field	431
G. Notes added in Proof	433
REFERENCES	435
AUTHOR INDEX	455
SUBJECT INDEX	461

# I

## MOLECULAR AND ATOMIC BEAMS

### I. 1. Introduction

THE subject of molecular beams is the study of directed beams of neutral molecules at such low pressures that the effects of molecular collisions are for most purposes negligible. The earliest molecular-beam experiments were those of Dunoyer (DUN 11). He used an apparatus illustrated in Fig. I. 1. A glass tube 20 cm long was divided into three separately evacuated compartments. Some sodium introduced into the first chamber was heated until it vaporized, whereupon a deposit of sodium appeared in the third chamber. The deposit was of the form to be expected on the assumption that the Na atoms travelled in straight lines in the evacuated tube.

Subsequent to Dunoyer's pioneering work, many different experiments based on the molecular-beam methods have been performed. Particularly significant from the point of view of the development of molecular-beam techniques have been the experiments of Stern and his collaborators at Hamburg in the nineteen-twenties and early thirties. The papers of Stern and Knauer in 1926 (STE 26, KNA 26, KNA 29) indeed laid down many of the principles of molecular-beam techniques which have been followed even to the present time.

Precision measurements of nuclear, molecular, and atomic properties began in 1938 with the introduction of the molecular-beam resonance method by Rabi and his associates (RAB 38, KEL 39). At first, the resonance method was applied to the measurement of nuclear magnetic moments only, but it was soon extended as a more general technique of radiofrequency spectroscopy initially by Kellogg, Rabi, Ramsey, and Zacharias (KEL 39a) in applications to molecules and later by Kusch and Millman (KUS 40) in the study of atomic states. Since 1938 the history of molecular beams has dominantly been the history of the resonance method. As discussed in subsequent chapters, important

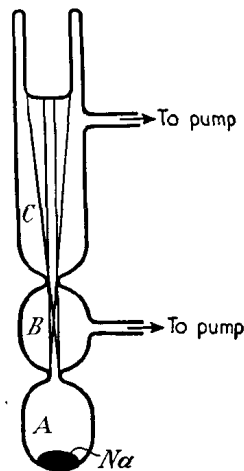


FIG. I. 1. Schematic diagram of Dunoyer's original atomic-beam apparatus. *A* is the source chamber, *B* the collimator chamber, and *C* the observation chamber (DUN 11).

improvements and extensions of the molecular-beam resonance method have been made by Lamb (LAM 50*a*), Ramsey (RAM 50*c*), Kusch (KUS 51), Rabi (RAB 52), Zacharias (ZAC 53), Lew (WES 53), and others. However, since 1938, most molecular-beam researches have been applications of the resonance technique to physical measurements. The molecular-beam laboratories at Columbia University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard University have been particularly effective in measuring with the resonance method many varied properties of nuclei, atoms, and molecules.

The developments in molecular beams prior to 1937 have been described in detail by Fraser in two different books (FRA 31, FRA 37). Since that time no book devoted exclusively to molecular beams has been published. However, considerable discussion of molecular beams is given in the nuclear moment books of Kopfermann (KOP 40) and Ramsey (RAM 53*b*, RAM 53*e*) and in various review articles (HAM 41, BES 42, KEL 46, EST 46, KUS 50, RAM 50, RAM 52). In accordance with existing conventions as to the scope of the subject molecular beams, the present book will be limited to beams of electrically neutral molecules. Ion beam experiments have been discussed extensively by Massey (MAS 50, MAS 52), Burhop (MAS 52), and others.

## I. 2. Typical molecular-beam experiment

Although molecular-beam experiments and apparatus vary greatly according to their applications, they also have many features in common. This is especially true of the experiments in recent years, which have almost exclusively been by the molecular-beam resonance method. For this reason a general description of a typical molecular-beam resonance apparatus is given in this section as an introduction to the more detailed considerations which follow in subsequent chapters.

A photograph of a typical apparatus is shown in Fig. I. 2. A schematic diagram of the apparatus is shown in Fig. I. 3. The molecules emerge from a source *S* into an evacuated source chamber. The source may be either a heated oven or a small chamber cooled with liquid nitrogen, depending on the vapour-pressure properties of the substance being investigated. The source shown in Fig. I. 3 is for the study of gaseous hydrogen and is cooled with liquid air. The pressure inside the source is about 6 mm Hg. A typical source slit width is 0.015 mm and height about 0.8 cm. Sometimes the slits are a few millimetres long to assure that a larger fraction of the emerging molecules goes in the direction of the detector. The molecules then pass through a separately

pumped separating chamber and into the main chamber. The purpose of the separating chamber is to aid in the attainment of a better vacuum in the main chamber. Typical pressures are  $2 \times 10^{-5}$  mm in the separating chamber, and  $5 \times 10^{-7}$  mm in the main chamber. These pressures are sufficiently low for most of the molecules to travel the entire length of the apparatus without being subjected to collisions.

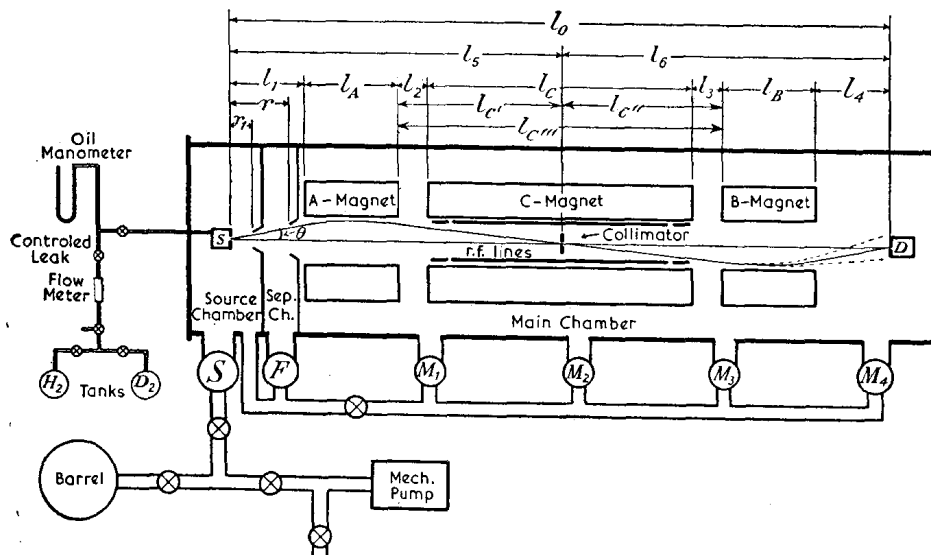


FIG. I. 3. Schematic diagram of a molecular-beam apparatus. The transverse beam displacements are much exaggerated (KOL 50).

The molecules are detected in the main chamber by any of several different kinds of detector described in Chapter XIV. Two of the most frequently used detectors are the surface ionization detector and the Pirani detector. The former consists of a heated wolfram (tungsten) wire of about 0.015 mm diameter. If an atom, such as potassium, with a low ionization potential (4.3 eV for K) strikes the heated tungsten wire, whose work function is 4.5 eV, the valence electron goes into the tungsten and the atom evaporates from the wire as a positive ion. The wire is surrounded by a negatively charged cylinder and the positive current to the cylinder is determined, thus providing a measurement of the beam intensity. The Pirani detector, used with non-condensable gases like  $H_2$ , consists of a small volume chamber ( $7.5 \text{ cm} \times 0.5 \text{ cm} \times 0.06 \text{ cm}$  in a typical case) along whose length are stretched one or more thin platinum strips (typically  $7.5 \text{ cm} \times 0.05 \text{ cm} \times 0.0001 \text{ cm}$ ). The beam is admitted to the Pirani cavity through a long narrow channel (2.5 cm long, 0.8 cm high, and 0.015 cm wide in a typical case).



The purpose of the long channel is to make it much easier for the directed beam molecules from the source to enter the cavity than for the randomly directed molecules inside the cavity to emerge; in this way a given number of incident molecules produces a much greater pressure inside the Pirani cavity than would be the case in the absence of the channel. A current is passed through the platinum strips to heat them about  $100^{\circ}\text{C}$  above the temperature of the cavity walls. The pressure changes in the cavity from the variations of beam intensity then lead to changes in the thermal conduction of the gas in the cavity and hence to variations of the temperature of the strips. These variations can be measured externally by noting the changes in the resistances of the wires. The resistances are usually measured by including the Pt strips as one or more arms of a Wheatstone bridge. To minimize effects from thermal and vacuum fluctuations two identical detectors are ordinarily used, their strips are placed in opposite arms of the bridge, and only one of the detectors is exposed to the beam. In this way most of the undesired fluctuations are partially cancelled. The detector in Fig. I. 3 is a Pirani detector.

The beam is defined by means of a collimating slit of about the same width as the source and detector. The collimator is usually placed approximately in the middle of the apparatus for reasons discussed in Chapter XIII. When the collimator is in place, the beam is fully defined and the full beam intensity will be measured by the detector only when the source, collimator, and detector are in line.

In Fig. I. 3 the molecules pass through two regions of inhomogeneous magnetic field produced by two magnets usually designated by the letters *A* and *B* and often called the deflecting and refocusing magnets. Fig. I. 4 is a photograph of a typical one of these magnets for producing an inhomogeneous magnetic field. Electrically neutral molecules or atoms which possess magnetic moments will be deflected by such inhomogeneous magnetic fields (in a uniform magnetic field there would be no net translational force since the forces on the north and south poles would be equal and opposite but in an inhomogeneous field one of these forces exceeds the other). Consequently, the molecules which in the absence of the field would have gone straight to the detector (as shown in the straight line of Fig. I. 3) will be deflected by the field so that they do not even pass through the collimator. On the other hand some molecules which in the absence of the field would have missed the detector will be deflected so as to pass through the collimator as shown by the curved line in Fig. I. 3; the deflexion shown in Fig. I. 3 is, of