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Impact of the multilayer dielectric design on the laser-induced damage threshold of pulse compression gratings for petawatt-class lasers

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The peak-power of petawatt-class lasers is limited by laser-induced damage to final optical components, especially on the pulse compression gratings. Multilayer Dielectric (MLD) gratings are widely used in compressor systems because they exhibit a high diffraction efficiency and high damage threshold. It is now well established that the etching profile plays a key role in the electric field distribution, which influences the laser damage resistance of MLD gratings. However, less attention has been devoted to the influence of the multilayer design on the laser damage resistance of MLD gratings. In this paper, we numerically and experimentally evidence the impact of the dielectric stack design on the Electric Field Intensity (EFI) and the laser-induced damage threshold (LIDT). Three different MLD gratings are designed and manufactured to perform laser damage tests. On the basis of the expected EFIs and diffraction efficiencies, the measured LIDTs show how the multilayer design influences the laser resistance of the MLD gratings. This result highlights the impact of the multilayer dielectric design on the electric field distribution and shows how to further improve the laser-induced damage threshold of pulse compression gratings. © 2023 Optica Publishing Group

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Ultra-fast laser facilities have reached a new level of power since the development of the Chirped Pulse Amplification (CPA) 5 technique [1]. The peak power remains limited by laser-induced 6 damage to components in and after the compressor system, which explains why pulse compression gratings are critical components of petawatt laser facilities. Multilayer Dielectric (MLD) pulse compression gratings are of particular interest due 10 to their high laser induced damage threshold and high diffrac-11 tion efficiency. Svakhin et al. demonstrated first the feasibility 12 of diffraction gratings made with dielectric materials [2]. A 13 few months later, Perry et al. evidenced the improvement of 14

the Laser-Induced Damage Threshold (LIDT) of MLD gratings compared to metallic gratings for similar ranges of diffraction efficiencies [3].

A lot of studies have been carried out to improve the LIDT of MLD gratings by optimizing the design, the manufacturing, and the cleaning processes [4–7]. MLD gratings are generally designed in two steps: the MLD stack is defined to maximize the reflectivity at the conditions of operation, such as angle of incidence, polarization, and wavelength. Then, the etching profile is added on the top layer and the parameters are defined to maximize the diffraction efficiency. The grating profile has a strong influence on the EFI. In particular, for a given period and condition of illumination, small duty cycles must be privileged since they allow to strongly decrease the EFI inside the pillars [8]. The strong influence of the etching profile on the EFI and therefore on the laser induced damage threshold of MLD gratings was evidenced experimentally in Ref. [9].

In this paper, we investigate the influence of the dielectric stack on the electric field distribution to optimize the laser resistance of pulse compression gratings of the PETAL facility [10]. The optimization relies on the reduction of the electric field intensity (EFI). Chorel *et al.* demonstrated an important improvement in the LIDT of the PETAL dielectric mirrors by modifying the layer thicknesses [11]. Based on these results, we develop a method to optimize MLD gratings. Starting with a given MLD stack, we defined the etching profile to maximize the diffraction efficiency. Then, we reduced the EFI by modifying the thickness of several upper layers. The electric field distribution and the diffraction efficiency were calculated numerically, and 3 designs were manufactured to perform laser damage tests to assess the numerical results.

Pulse compression gratings of PETAL laser operate in reflection, in *s*-polarization with an angle of incidence of 77.2° at a wavelength of 1053 nm. To calculate the performances of a grating design, we used a numerical model developed to calculate the diffraction efficiency and the electric field distribution. The model is based on the differential method with the fast Fourier factorization and the S-algorithm to solve the Maxwell's equations [12–15]. The model allows different input parameters to

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Fig. 1. (a) Representation of an etching profile in the top layer of the MLD stack. The profile is etched with a grating period d. The pillars have a trapezoidal shape with depth h and a slope angle α . The thickness DC at mid-height of the pillars corresponds to the Duty Cycle ($DC = 1 - \frac{c_{1/2}}{d}$). (b) Representation of the performances in terms of EFI and diffraction efficiency of the 14000 designs selected from the computational model. Only designs with a diffraction efficiency greater than 92% were selected. Each design is represented by a square plotted in terms of the EFI and diffraction efficiency associated with the design. The green dots represent the 3 designs selected for the fabrication of the samples. See Data file 1 for the description of the entire design. (c) Representation of the electric field distribution in the pillars and the top layers of the selected designs 1, 2, 3, represented in (b): design 1 represents the design with the lowest EFI value; design 3 represents the design with the highest EFI value and a similar diffraction efficiency to design 1; design 2 represents the third point of comparison and a trade-off between EFI and diffraction efficiency (see Tab. 1). Calculations are performed by considering a plane wave illuminating the grating from the top (superstrate) with an angle of incidence of +77.2°.

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be incremented over a defined range and step, such as etching 54 parameters or layer thicknesses. The model explores all possible 55 combinations using the brute force method and calculates the 56 grating performances of each design. 57

We paid special attention to the supply of samples when 58 designing the gratings. The manufacturing capabilities and 59 constraints of the suppliers have been taken into account. To 60 61 limit deviations, we considered a single etching profile.

First, we started with a given MLD stack used for previous 62 PETAL gratings. The design was [Borofloat / (LH)¹⁰ L / Air] 63 where L and H represent the SiO₂ and HfO₂ layers respectively. 64 The refractive indexes of HfO2 and SiO2 materials are taken 65 equal to 1.430 and 1.826, respectively. The etching profile was 66 defined in the top layer with trapezoidal shape (see Fig. 1(a)). 67 The duty cycle and the slope angle were set to values with the 68 lowest probability of deviation due to the fabrication process 69 at 0.44 and 88° respectively. The period is fixed by the PETAL 70 compressor specification at 562 nm. We do not consider a resid-71 ual thickness under the pillars, which is a source of potential 72 deviations. We maximized the diffraction efficiency by explor- 100 73 ing different values of the etching depth over a range between 101 74 400 nm and 800 nm, with a step of 10 nm. The results show 75 102 that a depth of 590 nm leads to a diffraction efficiency greater 103 76 than 98%. Next, we modified the MLD stack to reduce the EFI. 104 77 We perform a parametric optimization as a function of the 7 105 78 upper layers. The variation range of each layer is equal to 100 106 79 nm, with an incremental step of 10 nm. The model explored 10^7 107 80

combinations. Designs with a diffraction efficiency greater than 92% were selected.

Figure 1(b) represents the distribution of the 14000 solutions selected that exhibit a diffraction efficiency in the -1st order higher than 92%. They are represented as a function of the EFI and diffraction efficiency. In the narrow 92%-93% efficiency range, we observed that gratings show discrepancies of EFI values up to 13%. It clearly shows the impact of the MLD stack on the EFI values. We selected three designs to manufacture samples (see Fig. 1(b)): design 1 represents the design with the lowest EFI value; design 3 represents the design with the highest EFI value and a similar diffraction efficiency to design 1; design 2 represents the third point of comparison and a trade-off between EFI and diffraction efficiency (see Tab. 1). Figure 1(c)shows the electric field distribution and the variation of the layer thicknesses between each design (see Data file 1). The highest EFI value is localized for the three designs in the upper right side of the pillars for an incident beam coming from the left at an incidence of 77.2°.

The process of the manufacturing of the three samples is detailed in Fig. 2(a). First, the MLD stack was deposited through an e-beam evaporation process on borofloat substrate. The supplier responsible for the etching process used UV optical lithography, which is usually used for etching semiconductors. Therefore, a second step was implemented to make the samples compatible with the micro-electronics machines. These instruments work with detectors in the visible range. However, the substrate and



Fig. 2. (a) Representation of the grating sample process flow. First, the MLD stack is deposited on the borofloat substrate. Then, SiN and Ti layers are deposited on the backside of the substrate to opacify the samples. An anti-reflective and a photosensitive resin coatings are deposited on the MLD stack. Optical lithography records the pattern in the resin, which is then etched to obtain the final structure. SEM observations of (b) the manufactured etching profile which is representative of all designs and (c) a laser damage site of 1-on-1 tests. The image of the right corresponds to a zoom of the dashed zone.

Table 1. Numerical features of the 3 selected designs.

Designs	EFI _{max}	DE (-1R)	
1	1.63	92.8%	
2	1.75	98.2%	
3	1.88	92.4%	

the dielectric stack are transparent in this wavelength range. A 108 layer of Ti was deposited on the back side of the substrate to 136 109 opacify the substrate and thus make it detectable by the instru- ¹³⁷ 110 ments. A layer of SiN was also deposited to ensure the lift-off of 138 11 the plates from the sample holder after electrostatic clamping. 139 112 Then, an anti-reflective coating (ARC) and a layer of photosensi-140 113 tive resin coating (PRC) were deposited on the dielectric stack. ¹⁴¹ 114 The ARC layer aims to reduce reflections at the recording wave- 142 115 length of the etching pattern, i.e., 248 nm. A mask placed on 143 116 the optical path of the laser allows to print the etching profile 144 117 in the PRC. Dry etching was performed to etch the top SiO_2 $^{\rm 145}$ 118 layer. A plasma composed of N_2O_2 and C_4F_8 reacted with the 146 119 solid SiO₂. The etching depth depends on the reaction time and 147 120 during tests, the HfO₂ layer underneath the etching was difficult ¹⁴⁸ 121 to identify compared to the SiO2 layer. To remedy this issue, 149 122 we have chosen to keep a residual thickness of 30 nm under 150 123 the pillars. Finally, a cleaning process allows removing all the 151 124

reaction residues, especially the PRC and the ARC. Figure 2(b) 125 shows an SEM observation of the final etching. The DC featured 126 by the manufactured grating, estimated at roughly 0.50, slightly 127 128 differs from the DC used to perform the numerical designs and simulations (DC=0.44). With this new etching profile, we cal-129 culated the new performances of each design. We considered 130 possible deviation of the etching parameters over a range of 131 30 nm (4° for the slope angle) and a step of 5 nm (1°). The results 132 are presented in Tab. 2 with average values. The uncertainties 133 corresponding to the standard deviation. 134

Laser damage tests were performed on the dedicated optical set-up called DERIC at the French Atomic Commission (CEA-CESTA), described in Ref. [16]. A commercial Amplitude laser source provides a beam centered at 1053 nm with a pulse duration of 800 fs. The output energy is around 2 mJ with a repetition rate of 10 Hz. A 60 cm focal lens focuses the beam to obtain at the focal plan a Gaussian beam of diameter 160 μ m at 1/*e*. We performed 1-on-1 damage tests on each sample to determine the laser induced damage threshold (LIDT) [17]. Tests were carried out at 77.2° of incidence (operating incident angle of the gratings), 5 shots per fluence were set.

Results are shown in Tab. 2. We evidence that design 1 with the lowest EFI_{max} value corresponds to the design with the highest LIDT and inversely, design 3 with the highest EFI_{max} value corresponds to the design with the lowest LIDT. Let us point out the differences in LIDT are equivalent to the differences in EFI between each design.

Designs	EFI _{max}	EFI ₁ EFI ₁	LIDT (J/cm ²)	LIDT ₁ LIDT _i	LIDT _{int} (J/cm ²)
1	1.70 ± 0.13	/	3.67 ± 0.01	/	6.23
2	1.78 ± 0.09	+5%	3.49 ± 0.09	-5%	6.21
3	1.91 ± 0.08	+12%	3.19 ± 0.01	-13%	6.09

Table 2. 1-on-1 tests results and calculated features of manufactured designs.

Taking design 1 as a reference value, an increase of approx- 204 152 imately 5% and 12% in EFI was calculated for designs 2 and 3 153 respectively. Regarding the laser resistance, a decrease of 5% and 154 205 13%, for designs 2 and 3 was measured compared to design 1 re-155 spectively. The experimental results are therefore coherent with 156 207 the theoretical results. In addition, the calculation of the theoret-157 208 ical intrinsic damage threshold ($LIDT_{int} = EFI_{max} \times LIDT$) 158 209 reveals very close results between designs 1 and 2, but a devi-159 210 ation with design 3. This deviation may be the consequence of 160 211 manufacturing errors inducing a variation of the EFI_{max}. The 161 212 intrinsic LIDTs are very close and highlight a final etching profile 213 162 close to the profile defined in numerical simulations. By fixing 214 163 the etching profile, we demonstrated an improvement of the 215 164 LIDT by an optimization of the MLD design. Scanning electron 165 217 microscopy (SEM) observations of the damage sites evidence 166 218 that a portion of the pillars are ablated during the irradiation 167 219 (see Fig. 2(c)) while the MLD stack seems to be unaffected. This 168 220 result is concordant with the numerical simulations that pre-169 221 dict a maximum of the EFI (see Fig. 1(c)) on the nanostructured 170 pillars [18]. 171 223

To conclude, we investigated the influence of the MLD stack 172 224 on the electric field distribution of compression gratings. The 225 173 objective was to reduce the EFI by adjusting the thicknesses 226 174 227 of the upper layers. First, we started with a given MLD stack 175 228 design, and we defined the etching profile which maximizes the 176 diffraction efficiency. In a second step, we performed a para-177 metrical optimization of the EFI as a function of the thicknesses 178 of the 7 top layers of the multilayer, for a specific and constant 179 232 etching profile. We selected designs with diffraction efficiencies 180 233 greater than 92%. We obtained designs with similar diffraction 234 181 efficiencies, but with discrepancies in terms of EFI up to 13%. 235 182 We manufactured three samples to perform laser damage tests. 236 183 The experimental results follow the numerical predictions of the 237 184 EFI, we found equivalent deviation of laser damage threshold ²³⁸ 185 than EFI values. These results demonstrate clearly the impact of 239 186 240 the MLD stack on the electric field distribution of a grating and 187 188 consequently the laser damage threshold.

189 Manufacturing constraints limit the optimization of the etch-243 ing profile, which is the most sensitive part of grating man-190 244 ufacturing. Production errors of the etching can impact the 191 245 performance of the grating. With this approach, it is possible to 192 246 define a supplier-optimized etching profile and then optimize 193 247 the LIDT of the grating through the MLD design. The next step 248 194 249 of this work will be to find a protocol to optimize the MLD stack 195 250 196 and the etching profile in the same time. 251

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Data availability. Data underlying the results presented in this
 paper are not publicly available at this time but may be obtained from

the authors upon reasonable request.

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