

Vapor Pressure of Water Nanodroplets

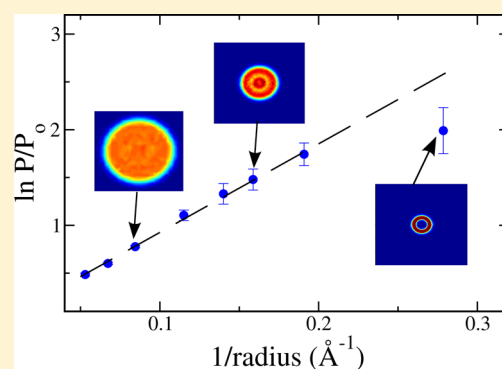
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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Classical thermodynamics is assumed to be valid up to a certain length-scale, below which the discontinuous nature of matter becomes manifest. In particular, this must be the case for the description of the vapor pressure based on the Kelvin equation. However, the legitimacy of this equation in the nanoscopic regime can not be simply established, because the determination of the vapor pressure of very small droplets poses a challenge both for experiments and simulations. In this article we make use of a grand canonical screening approach recently proposed to compute the vapor pressures of finite systems from molecular dynamics simulations. This scheme is applied to water droplets, to show that the applicability of the Kelvin equation extends to unexpectedly small lengths, of only 1 nm, where the inhomogeneities in the density of matter occur within spatial lengths of the same order of magnitude as the size of the object. While in principle this appears to violate the main assumptions underlying thermodynamics, the density profiles reveal, however, that structures of this size are still homogeneous in the nanosecond time-scale. Only when the inhomogeneity in the density persists through the temporal average, as it is the case for clusters of 40 particles or less, do the macroscopic thermodynamics and the molecular descriptions depart from each other.



I. INTRODUCTION

In describing the physical properties of matter, there is a certain length-scale for which the assumptions of classical thermodynamics break down because the discrete nature of matter becomes manifest. How and when this transition takes place between the macroscopic and the nanoscopic domains is one of the most intriguing questions in statistical mechanics and in many areas within condensed and soft matter sciences.^{1–4} The vapor pressure and the surface tension are two paradigmatic examples of those collective features that can not be grasped by a continuous thermodynamical approach when it comes to tiny droplets and nanoparticles.^{5–7} Yet, the comprehension of these two properties is highly relevant, not only from a fundamental, chemical-physics standpoint, but also because they determine processes of central interest in materials engineering and catalysis,^{1,3,8–11} as well as in environmental and atmospheric chemistry, where they appear as essential ingredients in classical nucleation theory (CNT).^{12–14} In particular, an accurate assessment of the vapor pressure of nanoaggregates is not easily accessible via experiments, neither through calculations.⁷ The Kelvin equation provides the vapor pressure (P_v) of a droplet as a function of the radius of curvature r of the interface:

$$\ln \frac{P_v}{P_0} = \frac{2\sigma}{r\rho RT} \quad (1)$$

where P_0 is the vapor pressure of the bulk substance, σ is the surface tension, ρ is the density of the condensed phase, R is the gas constant, and T is the temperature. For very small droplets of just a few nanometers of diameter, the effect of curvature on surface tension starts to be important. This can be accounted for through the Tolman equation⁵

$$\frac{\sigma}{\sigma_0} = \frac{1}{1 + 2\delta/r} \quad (2)$$

with σ_0 the surface tension of the planar interface, and δ the so-called Tolman length,¹⁵ which assumes a characteristic value for every fluid. The combination of eqs 1 and 2 can in principle yield the dependence on radius of the vapor pressure. Nevertheless, as the diameter of the droplet approaches the nanometer scale, the validity of these expressions derived from classical thermodynamics becomes questionable. There has not been a general agreement regarding the limit of applicability of these equations. On the basis of thermodynamic arguments or numerical simulations, or even based on indirect experimental evidence, different authors, including Tolman himself, have situated it in disparate lengths, from only a few Ångströms to some tens of nanometers.^{5,7,16–25} This limit has been explored using Lennard-Jones potentials and molecular dynamics simulations with constant number of particles.^{7,17–19,22} The

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69 vapor pressures computed using this route exhibit large
70 uncertainties, due to the small number of particles in the
71 vapor phase and to the infrequent collisions in the vapor.^{17,18}
72 Different approaches based on Monte Carlo simulations have
73 been also applied to investigate this limit in the context of
74 CNT, reporting that the deviations from the classical theory
75 occur in a size range that goes from only four up to sixteen
76 molecular diameters, depending on the interaction potential,
77 the temperature, and the methodology.^{23–25} Many studies have
78 focused on the nucleation of small liquid droplets, aiming to
79 estimate size distributions and the formation free energies of
80 Lennard-Jones and water clusters as a function of temperature
81 and supersaturation.^{26–30} Zhukhovitskii devised a grand
82 canonical molecular dynamics scheme to identify the critical
83 cluster size of argon for different T – P conditions.²⁶ To tackle
84 the same problem, Kusaka and collaborators later proposed a
85 coarse graining of the total volume in small compartments
86 containing in average no more than one molecule or aggregate,
87 with which they circumvented the issue of an arbitrary cluster
88 definition.²⁷ Equilibrium distributions and free energies were
89 evaluated in the grand canonical ensemble from the probability
90 of finding a cluster of a given size in the coarse-grained volume.
91 Soon after, this method was generalized by incorporating
92 umbrella sampling and the potential energy as an order
93 parameter, allowing to characterize the free energy surface of
94 argon in terms of the number of particles and the energy of the
95 aggregate.²⁸ Oh and Zeng implemented a canonical Monte
96 Carlo methodology where a restriction was imposed on the
97 maximum number of particles that a cluster can attain.³⁰ This
98 strategy allows to sample a metastable situation that otherwise
99 could not be observed, and was employed to determine the
100 critical size and the formation free energy of argon clusters. A
101 rather complete overview on theoretical and simulation aspects
102 of the interfacial properties of nanoscopic liquid drops was
103 recently offered in a topical review by Malijevský and Jackson.³¹
104 In this article, we employ a simple grand canonical screening
105 (GCS) approach³² to calculate the vapor pressure of water
106 droplets in the range 1–4 nm diameter. This methodology, in
107 combination with first-principles DFT molecular dynamics,
108 allows us to assess the applicability and the limitations of the
109 Kelvin equation, and to analyze at the molecular level the cause
110 of its divergence with respect to the molecular description.

II. METHODOLOGY

111 **A. Water Model.** The mW coarse-grained model of water³³
112 was employed to complete the large number of grand canonical
113 molecular dynamics simulations necessary to obtain the vapor
114 pressure curves reported in the next section. The mW potential
115 reproduces the energetics, density, and structure of liquid and
116 solid water and its phase transitions, with comparable or better
117 accuracy than most atomistic models, at nearly 1% of the
118 computational cost.³³ This model represents each molecule as a
119 single particle interacting through anisotropic short-ranged
120 potentials that encourage “hydrogen-bonded” water structures.
121 It adopts the short-ranged interaction form of the Stillinger-
122 Weber force-field, which consists of a sum of two-body
123 attraction terms favoring high coordination, and three-body
124 repulsion terms reinforcing tetrahedral hydrogen-bonded
125 configurations.³³ In recent years, the mW model has been
126 repeatedly applied to explain the behavior of water in various
127 conditions and regimes (see for example ref 34 and references
128 therein).

B. Molecular Dynamics Simulations. In this study, 129
molecular dynamics simulations were performed in the 130
canonical and grand canonical ensemble. Grand canonical 131
molecular dynamics (GCMD) schemes introduce Metropolis 132
Monte Carlo sampling throughout the dynamical evolution to 133
allow for particle exchange with a reservoir, hence preserving a 134
temporal description at a controlled chemical potential. The 135
movement of the particles is ruled by the integration of the 136
Newton equations using the Verlet algorithm at constant 137
temperature, which is controlled with the Nosé-Hoover 138
thermostat. Insertion and deletion attempts are effected on 139
single particles with equal probability and anywhere in the box, 140
adopting the usual acceptance criteria of the Monte Carlo 141
grand-canonical algorithm and assuming the vapor is an ideal 142
gas.^{35,36} Along the grand canonical dynamics, a number of 143
attempts for particle insertion and deletion are carried at every 144
time-step: this number is the so-called GC/MD ratio. It is 145
desirable to keep this parameter as low as possible to minimize 146
computer time, but in turn it must be high enough to ensure 147
that the target chemical potential is reached during the 148
simulation.^{37,38} GC/MD ratios in the range 20–100 have 149
been typically used in previous studies.^{37–39} In our simulations 150
a GC/MD ratio of 20 was adopted, which is common in the 151
literature and gives converged results for the systems examined 152
here. GCMD simulations were performed using a properly 153
modified version of the LAMMPS program.⁴⁰ 154

Classical and first-principles molecular dynamics of water 155
were performed to construct the density maps and density 156
profiles. Classical molecular dynamics were realized using the 157
LAMMPS program, with the same time-step as employed in the 158
GCMD simulations, equal to 5 fs. On the other hand, first- 159
principles dynamics were based on density functional theory 160
and the Car–Parrinello method,⁴¹ as implemented in the public 161
package Quantum-Espresso.⁴² These simulations were per- 162
formed in the microcanonical ensemble using a time-step of 163
0.19 fs, adopting the PW91 exchange-correlation func- 164
tional,^{43,44} Vanderbilt ultrasoft pseudopotentials,⁴⁵ and a cutoff 165
of 25 Ry on the plane-waves basis set. 166

C. Calculation of the Vapor Pressure: the GCS 167
Approach. The grand canonical screening procedure to 168
compute the vapor pressure is described in detail in reference.³² 169
In the following, we give a brief overview of the technique. 170
According to classical nucleation theory,¹⁴ for a given 171
supersaturation or chemical potential μ , a critical cluster size 172
 N^* exists involving a saddle point in the free energy surface. 173
The vapor pressure of such a cluster is related to this chemical 174
potential by $\mu_{\text{eq}} = \mu^\theta + RT \ln(P_v/P_\theta)$. In the present approach, 175
to determine P_v for a nanodroplet of size N , independent grand 176
canonical simulations must be conducted, each one at a 177
different chemical potential. As the simulation evolves, the total 178
number of molecules may rise or drop, depending on whether 179
the magnitude of μ is, respectively, above or below the 180
equilibrium value μ_{eq} associated with that N . For example, if the 181
value of μ fixed in the simulation is above the value of μ_{eq} 182
corresponding to the initial curvature of the interface 183
(determined by N), condensation occurs leading to an increase 184
in radius, which in turn diminishes the magnitude of μ_{eq} . In this 185
way μ_{eq} experiences a gradual decrease, moving away from μ , 186
and thus the growth of the droplet continues until the 187
simulation box is completely filled. Conversely, if μ is below μ_{eq} 188
at the beginning of the simulation, the evaporation proceeds 189
until all particles have disappeared. By repeating this computa- 190
tional experiment for a given N at different chemical potentials, 191

192 an upper and a lower bound can be established for μ_{eq} . The
 193 uncertainty in P_v is then determined by the lower and upper
 194 values of μ producing, respectively, the condensation and
 195 evaporation of the droplet. It must be noted, though, that as the
 196 chemical potential gets closer to μ_{eq} the ratio between particles
 197 insertion and deletion tends to 1, implying that longer
 198 simulations are required to discern between evaporation and
 199 condensation. The error can hence be reduced at the expense
 200 of computational time.³²

201 In the case of very small clusters in the vicinity of the
 202 equilibrium pressure, namely below 50 particles, the final
 203 evaporation or condensation behavior is not uniquely
 204 determined by the chemical potential but may depend on
 205 "hidden variables" as the initial structure of the cluster, the
 206 sequence of random numbers in the Monte Carlo run, or the
 207 assignment of initial velocities from the Boltzmann distribution.
 208 In other words, at the same chemical potential, two
 209 independent trajectories corresponding to nanodroplets of
 210 the same size might evolve distinctly to evaporation or to
 211 condensation. This ambiguous behavior is only observed for
 212 small N and follows from the fact that the stochastic
 213 components of the computational experiment become more
 214 important as the number of particles decreases. This is not a
 215 serious problem as far as it is recognized and can be handled by
 216 performing for each value of the chemical potential, a set of
 217 several short trajectories, each one based on a different
 218 sequence of random numbers or departing from different
 219 initial configurations and velocities. In particular, μ_{eq} is chosen
 220 as the value equaling evaporation and condensation
 221 trajectories with equal probability. The error bar for that
 222 data-point can be similarly estimated on the basis of
 223 condensation and evaporation probabilities. Here, 10 trajec-
 224 tories were performed for each data-point for $N \leq 94$, with the
 225 exception of $N = 9$ at the two highest temperatures, for which
 226 25 trajectories were considered. The lower bound for the
 227 uncertainty was chosen as the pressure for which the number of
 228 trajectories leading to condensation was larger than 20%.
 229 Similarly, the upper bound was given by the pressure above
 230 which the evaporation probability (or, equivalently, the number
 231 of trajectories producing evaporation) was less than 20%.
 232 Further details on the computation of the errors can be found
 233 in the supporting material.

234 We have shown in ref 32 that the GCS procedure described
 235 above reproduces the vapor pressure of bulk water and argon
 236 with a slightly better precision than the Gibbs-ensemble
 237 approach. Moreover, we have computed the relative vapor
 238 pressure for water aggregates of size ~ 2 nm using both the mW
 239 and the SPC/E models to find that the two force-fields lead to
 240 the same results.³²

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

241 We applied the GCS procedure to determine the vapor
 242 pressure of water aggregates of different sizes, from only 9
 243 molecules up to 960. Figure 1 presents the logarithm of the
 244 relative vapor pressure obtained from GCMD simulations with
 245 the mW model at three temperatures as a function of the
 246 inverse radius, compared with the results given by the Kelvin
 247 equation. This data is also summarized in Table 1. Strikingly,
 248 the thermodynamic formula reproduces the simulations for
 249 radii as small as 7 Å with discrepancies below 5% at 278 K, and
 250 even smaller for higher temperatures. For 298 and 318 K, the
 251 Kelvin equation predicts the vapor pressure of water aggregates

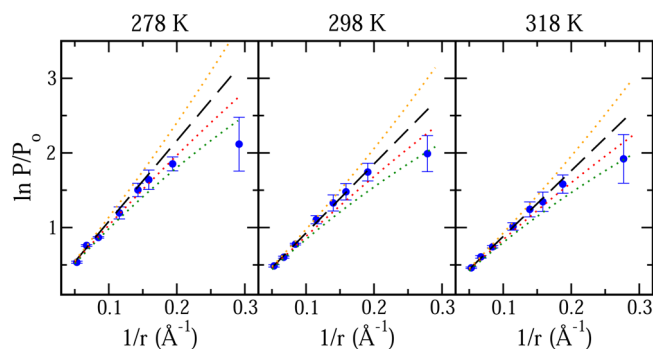


Figure 1. Logarithm of the relative vapor pressure of water nanodroplets as a function of the inverse radius. Blue circles: grand canonical screening results. The dashed and dotted lines show the predictions of the Kelvin equation for different Tolman lengths. Black: $\sigma = \sigma_0$ ($\delta = 0$). Orange: $\delta = -0.5$ Å. Red: $\delta = 0.5$ Å. Green: $\delta = 1.0$ Å.

with extraordinary accuracy all the way down to systems
 composed of just 37 molecules, or nearly 1.2 nm of diameter.

The approximation shows discrepancies of up to 20%,
 depending on temperature, for the cluster of 20 particles, and
 definitely breaks for the one of 9 molecules, which exhibits
 strong negative deviations for all three temperatures.

The magnitude and even the sign of the Tolman length (δ)
 appearing in eq 2 has for long been a matter of debate, but
 there is agreement that it must be of the order of the
 intermolecular distances.^{15,31,46–55} For water, the value
 originally proposed by Tolman was 1 Å,¹⁵ with many
 subsequent estimations from theory and simulations falling
 close to this former appraisal.^{48–52} The validity of these
 estimations has nevertheless been disputed by a number of
 studies claiming that the surface tension must increase with
 curvature (which implies $\delta < 0$),^{47,54,55} with a recent work
 based on molecular dynamics simulations reporting for the
 TIP4P/2005 water model a negative value of -0.56 Å.⁵⁶ On
 the other hand, the assessment of δ on the basis of experimen-
 tal data typically involves a number of assumptions and is
 technically challenging, and this explains why consensus has
 not been met either among experimentalists, who reported
 Tolman lengths for water ranging from -0.47 to $+0.6$ Å.^{57,58}
 Whereas the curvature dependence of the surface tension and
 the sign of the Tolman length remain controversial, there is
 general agreement on the following: it must be very small in
 magnitude, it depends on droplet size and temperature
 (presumably decreasing with T), and its physical meaning is
 lost when going to very small systems, in the order of a few
 molecular diameters.^{31,51,53} In this context, it is remarkable that

the Kelvin equation matches our data with a Tolman length of
 approximately zero until the cluster size reaches about 4
 molecular diameters, with an abrupt failure below that range.

Such a good performance of the thermodynamic formulation
 to describe these small objects may seem unexpected. In fact,
 the Kelvin equation turns out to be valid in a region where the
 inhomogeneities in the density of matter occur within spatial
 lengths of the same order of magnitude as the size of the
 aggregate, whereas among the major assumptions underlying
 the thermodynamic treatment, there are (i) the homogeneity of
 the surface and the continuous nature of the fluid, (ii) a
 constant density inside the droplet, independent from radius,
 and (iii) the sphericity of the aggregate. Clearly, these
 requirements do not hold for the instantaneous configurations
 of clusters consisting of less than a few hundred molecules, as

Table 1. Relative Vapor Pressures (P_v/P_0) and Radii (r , in Å) for Different Water Droplets Composed by N Molecules^a

N	278 K		298 K		318 K	
	r	P_v/P_0	r	P_v/P_0	r	P_v/P_0
9	3.43	8.31 (3.61)	3.59	7.35 (1.96)	3.61	6.82 (2.63)
20	5.16	6.38 (0.62)	5.24	5.71 (0.72)	5.33	4.87 (0.64)
37	6.30	5.15 (0.63)	6.30	4.39 (0.51)	6.32	3.84 (0.53)
51	7.00	4.50 (0.42)	7.14	3.78 (0.39)	7.19	3.47 (0.34)
94	8.66	3.31 (0.27)	8.69	3.02 (0.14)	8.74	2.76 (0.23)
237	11.81	2.38 (0.02)	11.84	2.18 (0.02)	11.84	2.10 (0.03)
471	14.85	2.14 (0.02)	14.86	1.82 (0.02)	14.90	1.83 (0.03)
960	18.86	1.70 (0.02)	18.88	1.62 (0.02)	18.90	1.58 (0.02)

^aAbsolute errors are given in parentheses. The values of P_0 for the mW model at 278, 298, and 318 K, are, respectively, 0.13 mbar, 0.49 mbar and 1.50 mbar.

can be seen in Figure 2, and as reflected in the nonequal eigenvalues of the moment of inertia tensor, presented in the

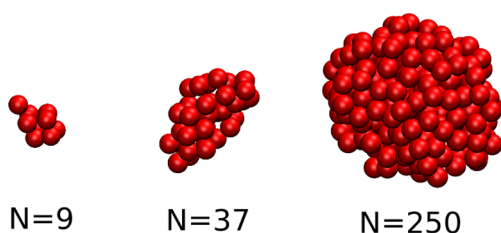


Figure 2. Instantaneous configurations of water clusters of different sizes, randomly selected from the molecular dynamics simulations at 298 K. The shape deviation from sphericity is significant for systems with less than 150 particles.

Supporting Information. Interestingly, however, they do hold for the temporal averages of their trajectories, displayed in the density maps of Figure 3. Since the thermodynamic properties are manifestations of the behavior averaged in the macroscopic time-scale, it can be argued that the master equations remain valid for those systems in which the dynamics smoothes down the discrete, inhomogeneous structure of the nanoaggregate. Figures 3 and 4 show that droplets of 1.2 nm diameter or larger reasonably fit into this premise: they all exhibit a spherical shape and a constant density along the most part of the condensed phase, equal to 0.033 \AA^{-3} , which is the density of bulk water. Smaller droplets depart from this paradigm: the averaged density is not homogeneous, but presents a peak on the boundary, while the sphericity is lost in shorter time lengths. Coincidentally, the agreement between the Kelvin equation and the simulations deteriorates at the same point

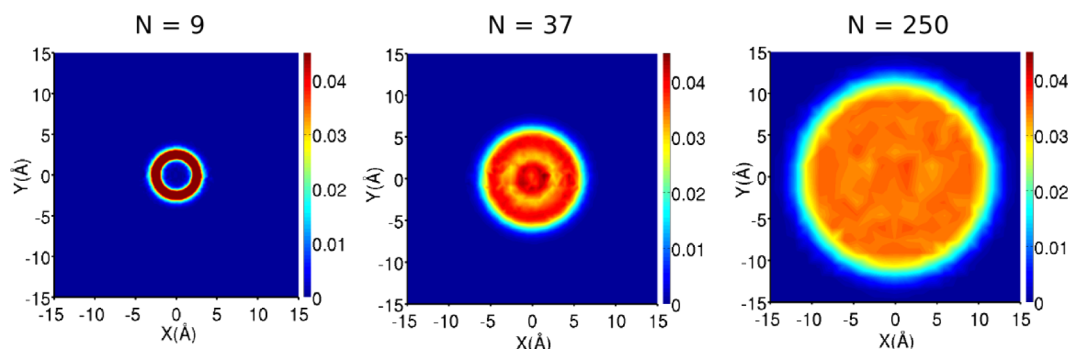


Figure 3. Bidimensional density maps of water droplets of different sizes at 298 K. Units for the color scale bar are \AA^{-3} . The densities were averaged over time-windows of 100 ns for the smaller systems and 3 ns for the largest.

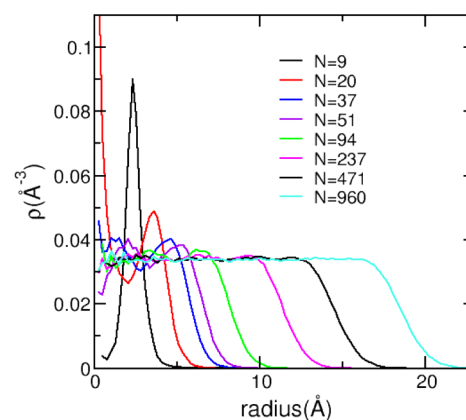


Figure 4. Time-averaged radial density profiles of water droplets of different sizes at 298 K. The averaging was performed on NVT molecular dynamics trajectories extended for at least 3 ns.

where the averaged density profile of the cluster starts to become strongly inhomogeneous.

The effect of rotations on the density distributions were checked by aligning the eigenvectors of the moment of inertia tensors at each step of the molecular trajectories. No appreciable differences were found when rotation was taken into account, presumably because the liquid-like nature of these clusters at room temperature produces continuous deformations in which the rotational and the internal degrees of freedom are too much coupled. The particular density distribution observed for the smallest clusters has been corroborated in the case of the 9 molecules aggregate by means of ab initio molecular dynamics simulations (Figure 5),

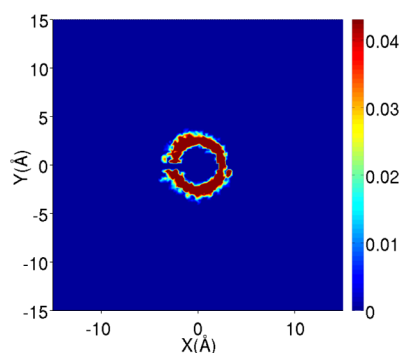


Figure 5. Same as Figure 3, obtained for the droplet of 9 molecules from ab initio molecular dynamics. The nonuniform density distribution is due to an insufficient averaging time of 20 ps.

328 which show that it is not an artifact of the mW potential. The
 329 agreement between the classical and the DFT ab initio
 330 calculations stems from the fact that both the mW and the
 331 DFT dynamics explore the same minima in phase space. Figure
 332 6 presents some representative instantaneous configurations

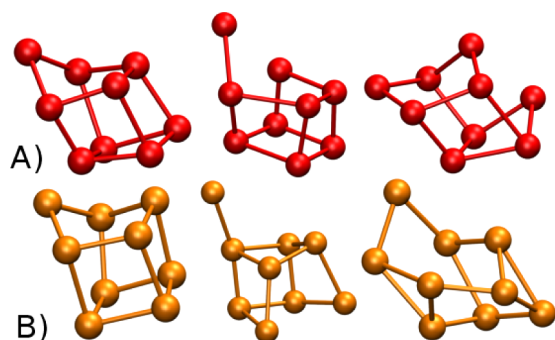


Figure 6. Different configurations of a cluster of 9 water molecules, taken from quantum (A) and classical (B) molecular dynamics simulations, based on DFT and on the mW model, respectively. For the sake of comparison, only the oxygen atoms are depicted. Bars are indicative of two atoms lying at less than 3.4 Å, which is the distance between two water molecules forming an H-bond. The first image of the series predominates along the dynamics in both approaches.

333 extracted from the classical and the quantum dynamics. Both
 334 approaches produce the same structures, typically showing a
 335 molecule in each one of the eight corners of a cube, plus a ninth
 336 molecule off an edge. These geometries turn out to be
 337 coincidental with the ab initio minimum energy configurations
 338 of the cluster of 9 water molecules reported in the
 339 literature.^{59,60} Therefore, we would not expect a substantial
 340 improvement if the mW potential were to be replaced by an
 341 atomistic or even a quantum-mechanical treatment: the
 342 resulting vapor pressure is ultimately determined by the
 343 magnitude of the intermolecular interactions, which classical
 344 water force-fields are fitted to reproduce pretty accurately,
 345 sometimes even better than obtained via first-principles
 346 simulations (for example, within DFT-GGA the solid–liquid
 347 transition temperature in water is off by around 140 K⁶¹).

348 Estimates to the vapor pressure of water nanodroplets can be
 349 obtained from the literature related to classical nucleation
 350 theory. Kusaka and collaborators applied a grand canonical
 351 methodology to evaluate equilibrium distributions and free
 352 energies of SPC/E water.²⁷ The maxima in the free energy
 353 curves of Figure 7 gives the critical cluster sizes,²⁷ in fair

agreement with our own results. For example, for a super-
 354 saturation $P/P_0 \approx 5$ at 298 K the critical cluster has
 355 approximately 35 molecules, whereas for the same temperature
 356 we find $P_v/P_0 = 4.39$ for an aggregate of 37 mW molecules
 357 (Table 1). The critical sizes are slightly overestimated in
 358 Kusaka's method with respect to our approach, this over-
 359 estimation becoming more notorious for higher supersatura-
 360 tions. The small discrepancies are attributable to the different
 361 methodologies and, to a lesser extent, to the distinct potentials
 362 (in previous work³² we showed that both the SPC/E and the
 363 mW models give very similar relative vapor pressures for a
 364 cluster of 94 molecules). The dynamical nucleation theory by
 365 Schenter et al. provides a different route to the vapor pressure
 366 of water clusters, based on the ratio between the evaporation
 367 and the condensation rates.^{62,63} Figure 3 of ref 62 shows for $P/
 P_0 = 10$ that the rate constants α_i and β_{i-1} reach the same value
 369 for droplets of slightly above 40 molecules. The GCS procedure
 370 predicts a P/P_0 ratio close to 5.2 for clusters of this size at 278
 371 K. The classical Kelvin equation, in turn, gives a relative vapor
 372 pressure of nearly 5.6, meaning that while our approach yields
 373 negative deviations from the Kelvin equation, the dynamical
 374 nucleation theory technique would show positive deviations.
 375 Part of this disagreement might be ascribed to differences in
 376 temperature and force fields: simulations in ref 62 have been
 377 performed at 243 K with a polarizable water model. Beyond
 378 this particular result, it must be noticed that methods based on
 379 CNT are designed to predict the evaporation and condensation
 380 rates for a distribution of nanoaggregates of different sizes in
 381 dynamical equilibrium. Our approach, instead, considers a
 382 single droplet (or interface) in equilibrium with the vapor
 383 phase, but isolated from any other cluster or interface. This is
 384 the same situation described by the Kelvin equation, which may
 385 explain why it shows a closer agreement with our results. A full
 386 accord between the two methodologies should then not be
 387 expected. The dynamical nucleation theory is a more powerful
 388 approach since it gives information on a full distribution of
 389 clusters. Moreover, CNT schemes provide evaporation and
 390 condensation rates, which in GCMD would require a careful
 391 validation to ensure that time-evolution is quantitatively
 392 realistic. On the other hand, dynamical CNT techniques rely
 393 on more assumptions and parameters than our approximation,
 394 which depends only on the force-field, and therefore we expect
 395 it to be more accurate to predict the relative vapor pressure of
 396 an isolated nanodroplet. In those CNT applications where, at
 397 variance with dynamical nucleation theory, aggregates are
 398 envisioned as independent entities in the vapor phase, with no
 399 connection with clusters of other sizes, the framework of a
 400 dynamical exchange of particles between a distribution of
 401 droplets of different sizes is lost, and the critical cluster size for
 402 a given supersaturation has to be consistent with the one
 403 predicted from our analysis. Possibly, the present treatment
 404 may be used in a complementary way to classical nucleation
 405 theory methods, by providing values for the vapor pressures of
 406 clusters that can be exploited in larger-scale models.

407 Our approach to the vapor pressure of clusters is
 408 conceptually analogous to the one followed by Zhukhovitskii
 409 to estimate critical sizes.²⁶ In that work, a grand canonical
 410 molecular dynamics scheme was proposed where the insertion
 411 of molecules takes place at random positions on the system
 412 boundary with velocities chosen from the Maxwell–Boltzmann
 413 distribution, removing at the same time any molecule coming
 414 from the simulation cell and traveling across this boundary.²⁶ In
 415 this way, the algorithm reproduces a vapor environment

417 corresponding to a desired temperature and pressure. To
418 identify the critical cluster size for different conditions, the
419 number of particles N was monitored as a function of time at a
420 fixed pressure and temperature, starting from different cluster
421 sizes. Two possibilities were observed for these trajectories:
422 evaporation or condensation, meaning respectively that the
423 initial size was below or above the critical value. This behavior
424 is analogous to the one observed in the GCS simulations, with
425 the only distinction that in our work different chemical
426 potentials were screened for a given initial size to determine the
427 vapor pressure, whereas Zhukhovitskii screened different initial
428 values of N for a fixed pressure to obtain the critical size.
429 Nevertheless, the two approaches are equivalent and provide
430 access to the same information, i.e., the size of the metastable
431 cluster associated with a given vapor pressure. The molecular
432 dynamics method proposed in ref 26 is likely to be better suited
433 to examine weakly interacting fluids as the Lennard-Jones
434 model, for which small clusters are difficult to stabilize in a
435 more conventional grand canonical framework. On the other
436 hand, our approach seems more appropriate for systems
437 exhibiting a low vapor pressure as water, where the application
438 of Zhukhovitskii's scheme would require very large simulation
439 cells and long sampling times to ensure a reasonable exchange
440 of particles in the vapor phase that provides a converged
441 statistics.

IV. FINAL REMARKS

442 In summary, we have determined the vapor pressure of water
443 nanodroplets from 9 to 960 molecules. The results led us to
444 conclude that the Kelvin equation is valid as far as the
445 temporally averaged density of the water droplets exhibit a
446 homogeneous profile, which establishes a link between time
447 and the basic assumptions behind any thermodynamic
448 approach. This is in fact the case for droplets as small as 0.6
449 nm radius at 278 K or even smaller at higher temperatures. For
450 water, this implies a radius of only two molecular diameters,
451 which is much smaller than the limit of around 10 molecular
452 diameters for which the capillary approximation is considered
453 to be valid in the literature.³¹ A question remains on the
454 universality of the present conclusions, specially their
455 connotation for other nanosystems exhibiting different
456 structure and interactions strength. This topic will be the
457 subject of future investigations.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

460 Plots of the pressure-dependent evolution of the number of
461 molecules as a function of simulation step for clusters of 94, 37,
462 and 9 molecules; the eigenvalues of the moment of inertia
463 tensor for various clusters; the definition of the nanodroplet
464 radii; details on cell size and starting configurations, and on the
465 calculation of the error for small clusters. This material is
466 available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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Notes

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