

Residual trapping of supercritical CO₂ in oil-wet sandstone

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Abstract

Residual trapping, a key CO₂ geo-storage mechanism during the first decades of a sequestration project, immobilizes micrometre sized CO₂ bubbles in the pore network of the rock. This mechanism has been proven to work in clean sandstones and carbonates; however, this mechanism has not been proven for the economically most important storage sites into which CO₂ will be initially injected at industrial scale, namely oil reservoirs. The key difference is that oil reservoirs are typically oil-wet or intermediate-wet, and it is clear that associated pore-scale capillary forces are different. And this difference in capillary forces clearly reduces the capillary trapping capacity (residual trapping) as we demonstrate here. For an oil-wet rock (water contact angle $\theta = 130^\circ$) residual CO₂ saturation $S_{CO_2,r}$ ($\approx 8\%$) was approximately halved when compared

23 to a strongly water-wet rock ($\theta = 0^\circ$; $S_{\text{CO}_2,r} \approx 15\%$). Consequently, residual trapping is
24 less efficient in oil-wet reservoirs.

25

26 **Keywords:**

27 CO₂ geo-sequestration; Residual trapping; Storage capacity; Wettability; Oil-wet; Oil
28 reservoir

29

30 **1. Introduction**

31 Carbon geo-sequestration has been identified as a feasible technology to mitigate global
32 warming [1-3]. Technically, CO₂ is captured from large emitters (e.g. coal-fired power
33 plants), and injected deep underground into geological formations for storage. However,
34 although CO₂ is in a dense supercritical state at reservoir conditions (below 800m
35 depth), it migrates upwards as it has a lower density than the resident formation brine.
36 One key mechanism, which prevents the CO₂ from leaking back to the surface is
37 residual trapping, where the CO₂ plume is split into many micrometre sized bubbles
38 which are immobilized by capillary forces in the pore network of the rock [4-8]. Pore-
39 scale residual trapping has been proven to work in clean sandstone [7] and carbonate
40 [9,10]. However, this mechanism has not been proven for oil-wet rock, despite its key
41 importance as initial industrial scale CO₂ storage projects are very likely to occur in oil
42 reservoirs [11]; and these oil reservoirs are typically oil-wet [12]. The significance of oil
43 reservoirs for carbon storage is high, as sequestration can be directly combined with
44 CO₂ driven enhanced oil recovery [13-15]; furthermore, depleted oil reservoirs already
45 have required infrastructure in place [16], and they are typically well characterised in

46 terms of seismic surveys, which significantly aids (reservoir scale) CO₂ flow
47 monitoring [17].

48

49 We thus imaged initial and residual CO₂ in an oil-wet rock at typical storage conditions
50 with an x-ray micro-computed tomograph (μ CT), and we demonstrate that the residual
51 trapping capacity is significantly reduced in oil-wet rock at (high pressure) storage
52 conditions.

53

54 **2. Experimental Procedure**

55 **2.1 Simulating subsurface conditions**

56 A sandstone oil reservoir at a depth of approximately 1000m was simulated (10MPa
57 pore pressure, 318K temperature). For this, a clean homogeneous sandstone
58 (Bentheimer) was selected to represent storage rock. Small core plugs (5mm diameter
59 and 10mm length) were drilled and used for the experiments. Porosity was 22%,
60 permeability 1800mD, and the rock consisted of 99wt% quartz, 0.7wt% kaolinite, and
61 0.3wt% rutile.

62 This rock was completely water-wet at ambient conditions (0° water contact angle in
63 air), note that at higher pressures quartz is less water-wet [18-20]. To mimic an oil
64 reservoir the wettability of the rock was altered by immersing the plug into silane
65 (Dodecyltriethoxysilane, 99.9mol% purity, from Sigma-Aldrich) under vacuum (so that
66 the plug was fully saturated with the silane) and ageing the plug for 4 weeks at ambient
67 conditions [21]. This process rendered the plug strongly oil-wet (130° water contact
68 angle at ambient conditions in air).

69

70 **2.2 Imaging scCO₂ at the pore-scale with μ CT**

71 The oil-wet core plug was mounted into a high pressure μ CT cell [7], vacuumed and
72 fully saturated with doped “dead” brine (7wt% NaI in deionized water; note that NaI is
73 required for CT contrast). Subsequently 15 MPa confining pressure was applied, and
74 pore pressure was raised to 10MPa. All flow lines and fluids were isothermally heated
75 to 318K. These conditions approximately correspond to a storage depth of 1000m, see
76 above. The dead brine was then displaced with >40 pore volumes (PV) of “live” brine
77 (live brine is brine thermodynamically equilibrated with CO₂; [22]). Then 40PV of
78 supercritical (sc) CO₂ were injected at a flow rate of 0.1 mL/min, which corresponded
79 to a capillary number of 6×10^{-8} , and the core plug was imaged in 3D at a resolution of
80 $(3.4\mu\text{m})^3$ with an Xradia VersaXRM μ CT instrument. Finally live brine (40PV) was
81 injected at a flow rate of 0.1mL/min, which corresponded to a capillary number of $1.7 \times$
82 10^{-6} , and the sample was μ CT imaged again. This experiment was repeated again, and
83 the results were reproducible. The μ CT images were filtered with a 3D non-local means
84 algorithm [23] and segmented with a watershed algorithm [24]. Petrophysical properties
85 were then measured on the images, see below. For comparison, the same experiment
86 was conducted again with a water-wet Bentheimer plug (0° water contact angle, see
87 above).

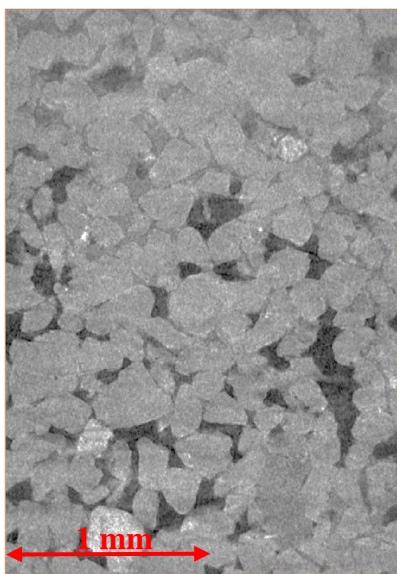
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89 **3. Results and Discussion**

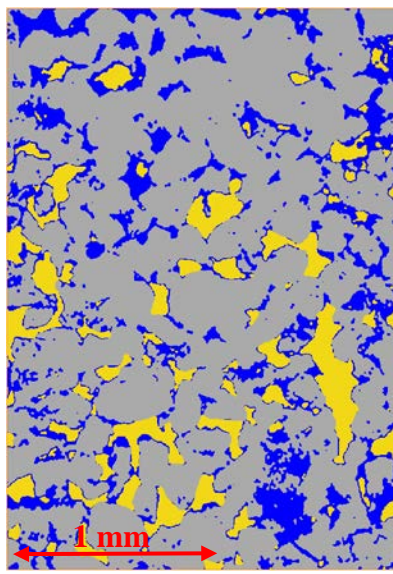
90 **3.1 Visualization, cluster morphologies and initial and residual CO₂ saturations**

91 Initial and residual CO₂ saturations of the oil-wet and water-wet plugs are visualized in
92 Figure 1. Initial CO₂ saturations ($S_{\text{CO}_2,i}$) were approximately the same ($\sim 50\%$), but the
93 residual saturation ($S_{\text{CO}_2,r}$) in the oil-wet plug was significantly lower ($\approx 8\%$) than in the

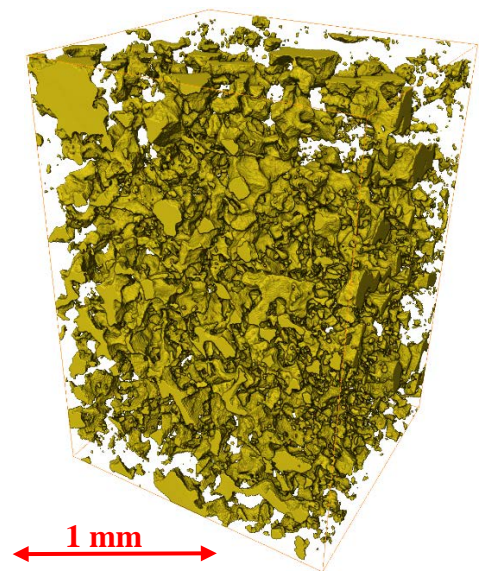
94 water-wet plug ($S_{CO_2,r} \approx 15\%$), Table 1. Precisely, the $S_{CO_2,r}$ measured for the water-
95 wet plug was 14.9%, consistent with independent measurements ([5,6,7,9,25,26]; note
96 that $S_{CO_2,r}$ varies to some degree as it is also a function of porosity [27] and pore body-
97 pore throat aspect ratio [28,29]); and CO_2 was located mainly in larger pores, although
98 in some cases it also spread into relatively small pores. This indicates weakly water-wet
99 conditions, consistent with 2D micromodel [30,31] and contact angle [18-20,32-39]
100 measurements.



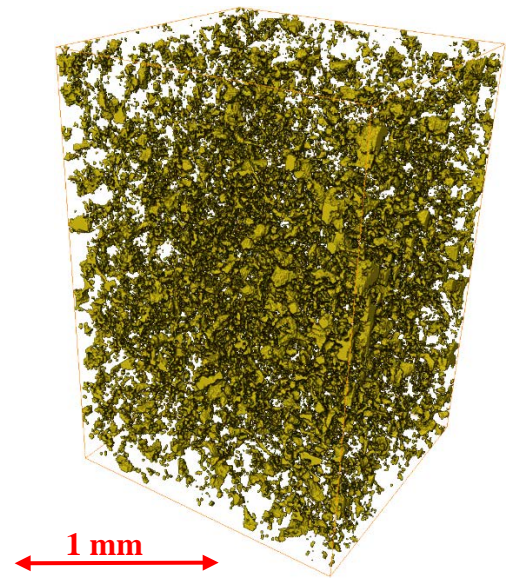
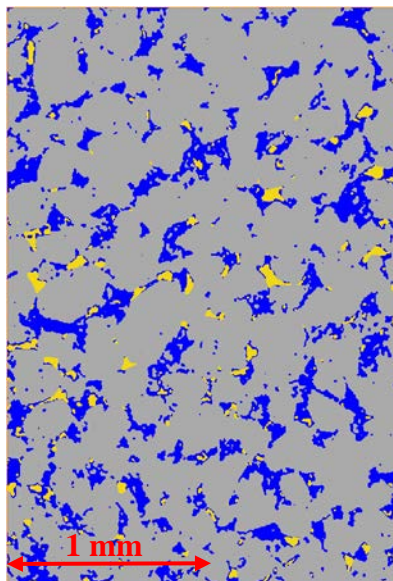
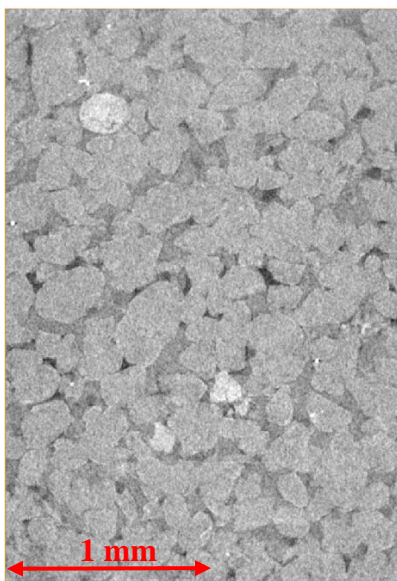
(a)

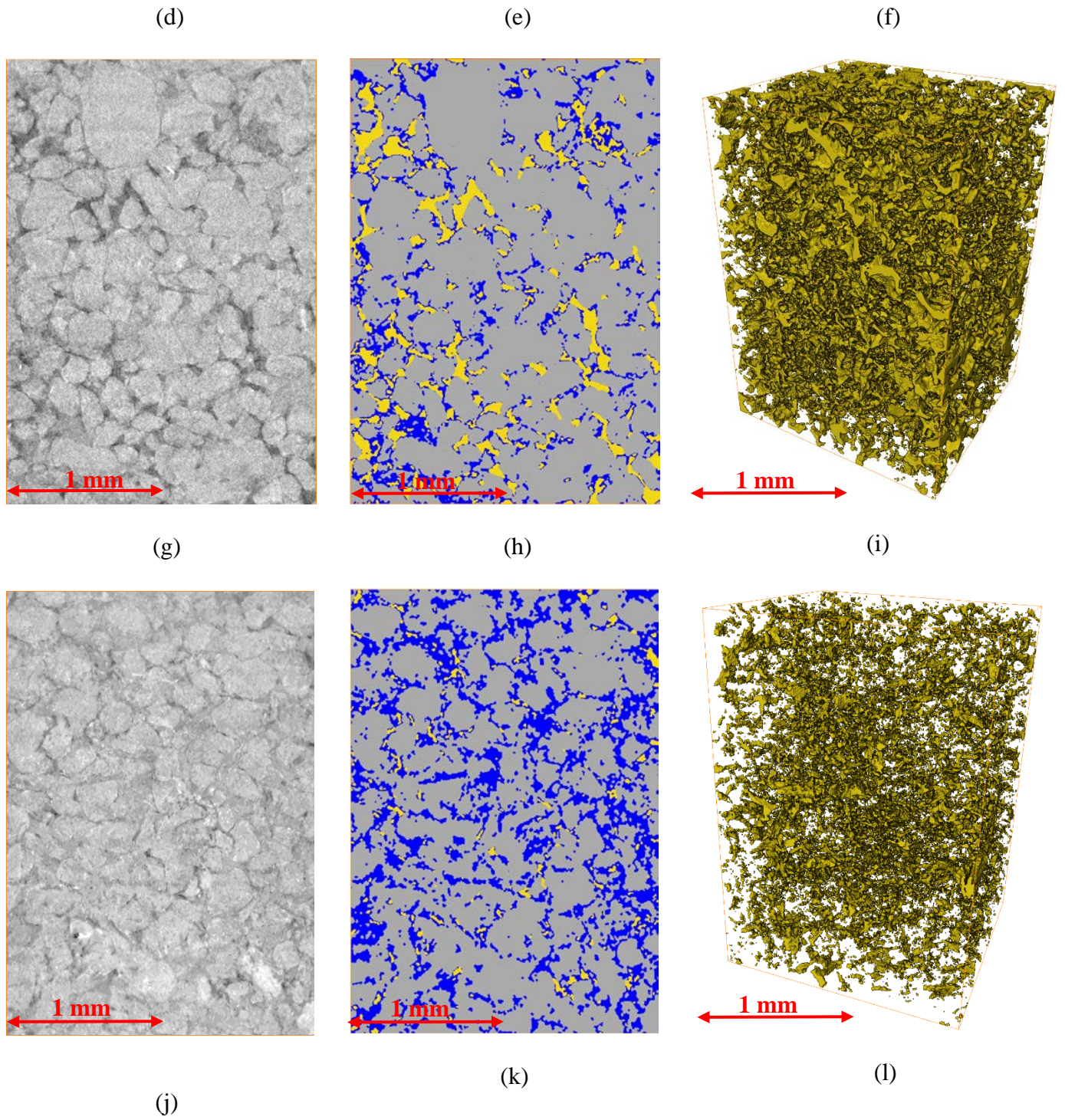


(b)



(c)





101

102 **Figure 1.** μ CT image of Bentheimer sandstone at 10MPa pore pressure and 318K: (a)103 water-wet initial CO₂ saturation, raw image; (b) water-wet initial CO₂ saturation,104 segmented image; (c) CO₂ clusters in 3D for the water-wet initial CO₂ saturation, a

105 volume of 3mm³ is shown; (d) water-wet residual CO₂ saturation, raw image; (e) water-
 106 wet residual CO₂ saturation, segmented image; (f) CO₂ clusters in 3D for the water-wet
 107 residual CO₂ saturation, a volume of 3mm³ is shown; (g) oil-wet initial CO₂ saturation,
 108 raw image; (h) oil-wet initial CO₂ saturation, segmented image; (i) CO₂ clusters in 3D
 109 for the oil-wet initial CO₂ saturation, a volume of 3mm³ is shown; (j) oil-wet residual
 110 CO₂ saturation, raw image; (k) oil-wet residual CO₂ saturation, segmented image; (l)
 111 CO₂ clusters in 3D for the oil-wet residual CO₂ saturation, a volume of 3mm³ is shown.
 112 CO₂ is black/dark grey, brine is grey and sandstone is light grey; in the segmented
 113 images CO₂ is yellow, brine is blue and rock is grey.

114

115 **Table 1.** Initial and residual CO₂ saturations in water-wet and oil-wet Bentheimer
 116 sandstone at 318K and 10MPa pore pressure.

Wettability state	Contact angle [°] ^a	Initial CO ₂ saturation [%]	Residual CO ₂ saturation [%]
Water-wet	0	50.6	14.9
Oil-wet	130	49.2	8.7

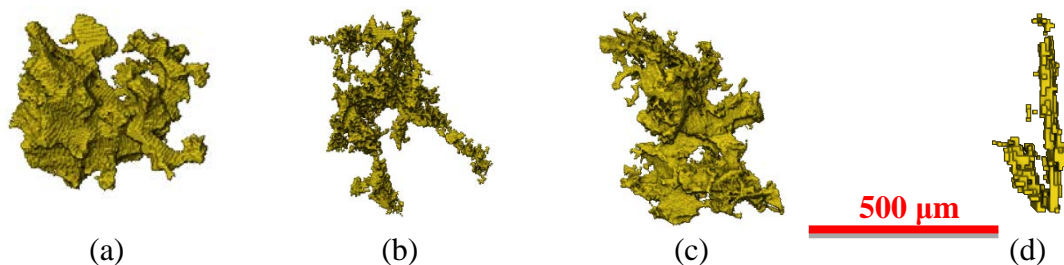
117 ^awater contact angle in air at ambient conditions.

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119 The fact that $S_{CO_2,r}$ was significantly lower in the oil-wet plug (8.7%, i.e. ~40% less
 120 CO₂ was trapped in this scenario) is consistent with measurements in an oil-wet plastic
 121 bead pack [40], where a substantial reduction of residual scCO₂ was observed when
 122 compared to a water-wet analogue. Furthermore, CO₂ was frequently located in smaller
 123 pores and adjacent to rock surfaces, which indicates intermediate- or CO₂-wet
 124 behaviour. Such wetting behaviour was also observed in 2D micromodels [30] and
 125 contact angle measurements [41-45].

126 The morphology of the CO₂ clusters in the water-wet plug was also different than in the
 127 oil-wet plug (Figure 2): while the CO₂ clusters in case of the initial CO₂ saturation state
 128 in the water-wet plug were bulky and essentially mimicked the pore space geometry, the
 129 corresponding residual CO₂ clusters thinned out considerably and had a somewhat
 130 fractal-like shape. Compare this with observations for an oil-water system in a
 131 completely water-wet sandstone ([46]; which is known to be strongly water-wet, also at
 132 reservoir conditions [47]); here the initial and residual clusters mimicked the pore
 133 geometry. We conclude that the more fractal-like shape for the residual CO₂ clusters is
 134 caused by a shift towards weakly water-wet conditions (CO₂-brine-quartz is weakly
 135 water-wet at reservoir conditions, (e.g.[20]). The initial CO₂ clusters in the oil-wet plug
 136 were already thinner, more “skeleton-like”, than their water-wet counterparts, and the
 137 associated residual CO₂ clusters were flat and sheet-like (Figure 2d). This is somewhat
 138 similar to what has been observed for an oil-water system in an intermediate-wet
 139 sandstone [48], where sheet-like residual oil clusters were observed. This indicates that
 140 the oil-wet plug showed intermediate-wet or CO₂-wet behaviour, consistent with 2D
 141 micromodel and contact angle measurements, see above.

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144

145 **Figure 2.** Morphologies and volumes of the largest initial and residual CO₂ clusters in
 146 Bentheimer sandstone at 318K and 10MPa pore pressure: (a) water-wet initial CO₂

147 saturation (volume = $27.7 \times 10^6 \mu\text{m}^3$), (b) water-wet residual CO_2 saturation (volume =
 148 $5.39 \times 10^6 \mu\text{m}^3$), (c) oil-wet initial CO_2 saturation (volume = $18.4 \times 10^6 \mu\text{m}^3$), (d) oil-wet
 149 residual CO_2 saturation (volume = $3.03 \times 10^6 \mu\text{m}^3$).

150

151 3.2. CO_2 cluster statistics

152 3.2.1 CO_2 cluster size distributions

153 CO_2 cluster size distributions were analysed for all scenarios (oil-wet, water-wet,
 154 residual, initial), they are plotted in Figure 3. As in other experiments of this type [e.g.
 155 7,9,10,46,48-52] power-law correlations were observed ($N \propto V^{-\tau}$, where N is the count
 156 number of clusters of size V , and τ is a fitting exponent), Table 2.

157

158 **Table 2.** Statistical parameters associated with the initial and residual CO_2 clusters for
 159 oil-wet and water-wet sandstone (Bentheimer, 318K, 10MPa pore pressure).

Plug state		τ	p
Water-wet	Initial CO_2	1	0.79
	Residual CO_2	1.6	0.85
Oil-wet	Initial CO_2	1	0.83
	Residual CO_2	1.9	0.85

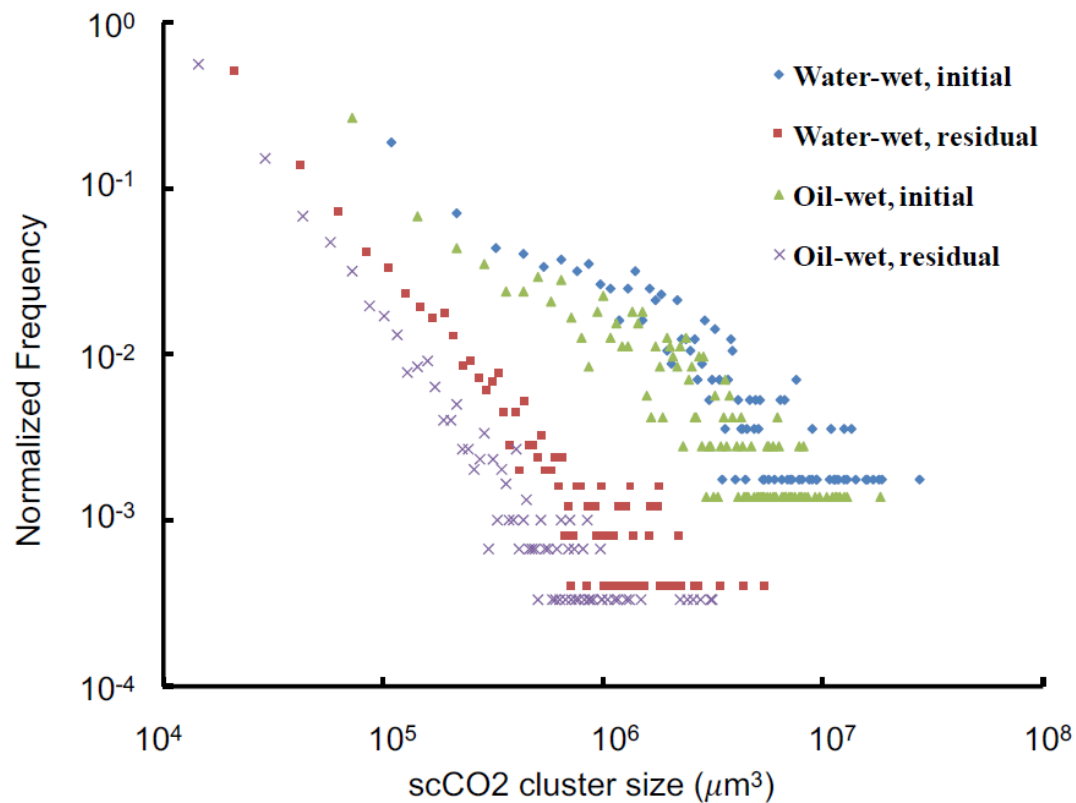
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162 This essentially means that, for each scenario, a large number of small clusters was
 163 observed, and only few large clusters. As expected the largest CO_2 clusters at initial
 164 CO_2 saturation state ($V_{\text{max}} = 28 \times 10^{-6} \mu\text{m}^3$ for the water-wet rock and $V_{\text{max}} = 18 \times 10^{-6}$
 165 μm^3 for the oil-wet rock) were significantly reduced by waterflooding ($V_{\text{max}} = 5 \times 10^{-6}$
 166 μm^3 for the water-wet rock and $V_{\text{max}} = 3 \times 10^{-6} \mu\text{m}^3$ for the oil-wet rock). Furthermore,

167 the largest clusters always spanned almost the entire observed volume, which may
 168 imply that waterflooding (especially in oil-wet reservoirs) reduces the efficiency of
 169 structural trapping as the height of the CO₂ plume may not be affected while the CO₂
 170 saturation in the bulk rock is reduced.

171



172

173 **Figure 3.** Initial and residual CO₂ droplet size distributions measured in water-wet and
 174 oil-wet Bentheimer sandstone at 318K and 10MPa pore pressure.

175

176 With respect to the scaling exponent τ ; τ was significantly increased by waterflooding;
 177 this effect is caused by snap-off of many small CO₂ droplets [53]. Interestingly, τ
 178 increased more in the oil-wet plug, an effect which must be caused by the wettability (as
 179 all other parameters were constant, see methods section above). Mechanistically, CO₂

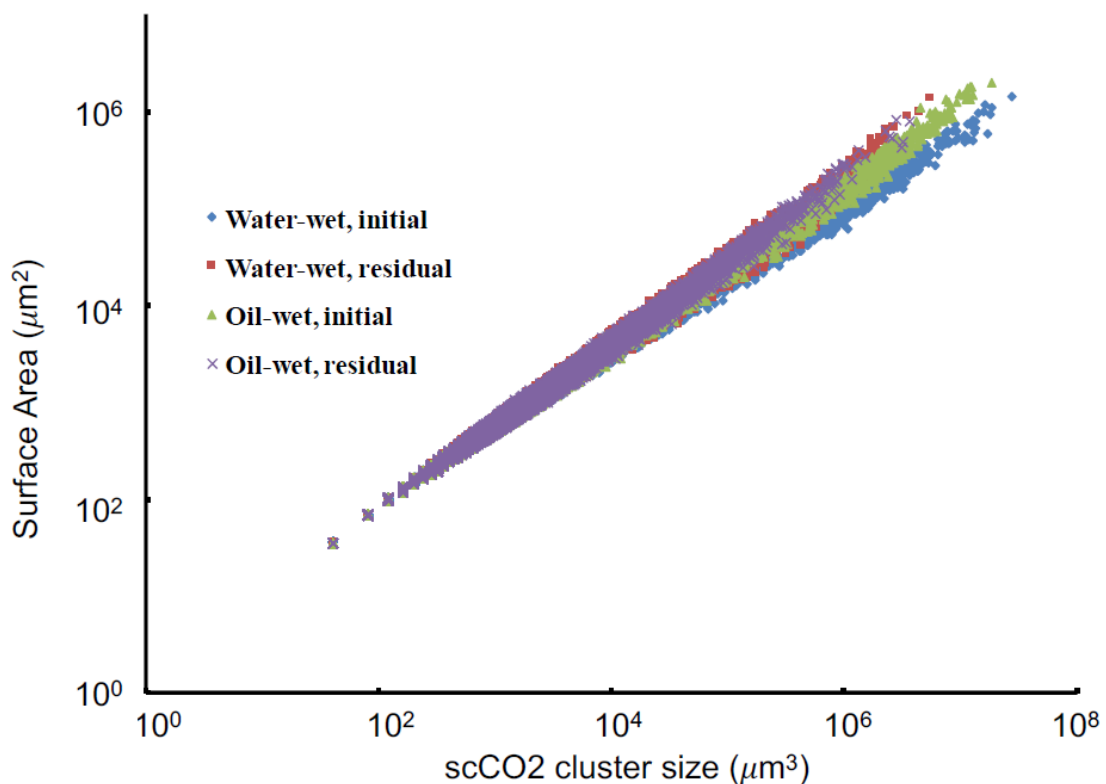
180 can enter small pores in the oil-wet plug (due to the lower capillary entry pressure
 181 constraint [54]; as oil-wet surfaces are more CO₂-wet, cp. review paper by [37]), and
 182 these CO₂ volumes in the smaller pore channels may also snap-off, leading to additional
 183 small clusters (= larger τ).

184

185 3.2.2 CO₂-water interfacial areas

186 Subsequently, surface areas A for each CO₂ cluster were measured and plotted against
 187 their volumes V , cp. Figure 4. From the graph again a power-law relation is evident ($A \sim$
 188 V^{-p}); and as with all other measurements of this kind [28,49,55], p was always ~ 0.8 .

189



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 191

192 **Figure 4.** CO₂ droplet surface areas plotted against their volumes for various
 193 conditions, at 318K and 10MPa pore pressure.

194 In this context it is interesting to note that the power-law exponents measured (τ and p)
195 are significantly lower than predicted by percolation theory (which predicts $\tau = 2.189$
196 and $p \approx 1$; [56,57]). We conclude that simple percolation models will not deliver accurate
197 and reliable predictions, as already evident in Georgiadis et al.'s work [50].

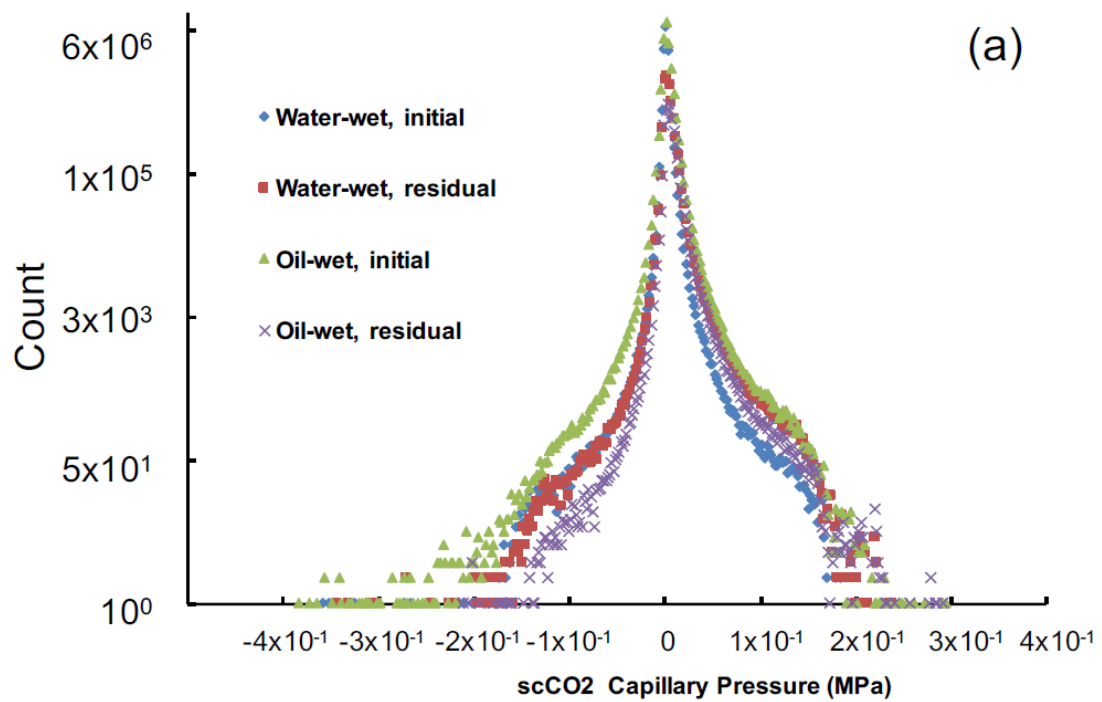
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199 **3.2.3 Capillary pressure distributions**

200 Finally, we measured curvatures (C) of each cluster, and calculated associated capillary
201 pressures (p_c) for each CO₂ bubble and water droplet ($p_c = \gamma C$; Figure 5) assuming a
202 water-CO₂ interfacial tension γ of 40mN/m [58,59].

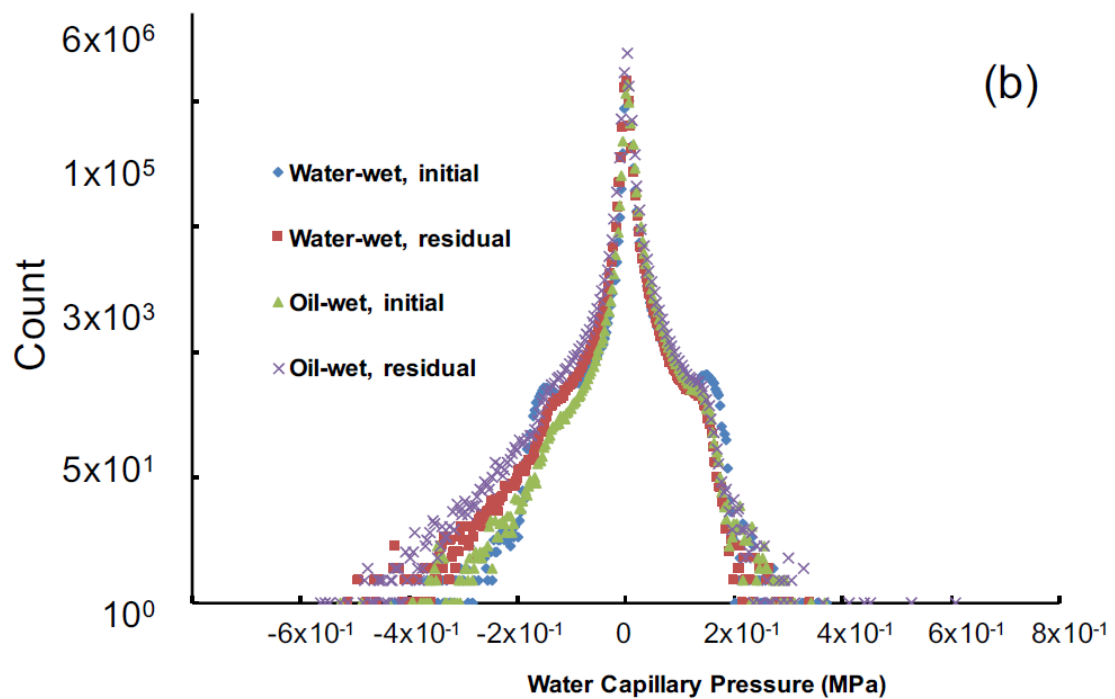
203

204 The capillary pressure distributions were roughly bell-tower shaped, and always showed
205 a narrow and high peak around zero capillary pressure, consistent with data reported for
206 oil-water systems [60]. Nominally the capillary pressures ranged from ~ -0.4 MPa to +
207 0.3MPa in case of CO₂, and from -0.6MPa to +0.6MPa in case of water (the water
208 distributions were slightly stretched to the left, Figure 5b).



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212

213 **Figure 5.** CO₂ (a) and water (b) droplet capillary pressures measured in water-wet and

214 oil-wet Bentheimer sandstone at 318K and 10MPa pore pressure.

215 **4. Conclusions and Implications**

216 We demonstrated that residual CO₂ saturations ($S_{CO_2,r}$) in oil-wet sandstone are
217 dramatically lower than in equivalent water-wet sandstone ($S_{CO_2,r} = 8.7\%$ versus
218 14.9%). This is consistent with data reported for a plastic bead pack [40], and indicates
219 that oil-wet rock is intermediate-wet or CO₂-wet at reservoir conditions; a phenomenon
220 which was also observed in independent contact angle measurements [41-45]. This shift
221 in CO₂-wettability also significantly influenced CO₂ cluster morphologies and residual
222 cluster size distributions: flatter and more sheet-like clusters and more small CO₂
223 bubbles were observed in the oil-wet sample.

224

225 We conclude that, importantly, residual trapping is less efficient in oil reservoirs than in
226 deep saline aquifers.

227

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233 carbon storage options. Funding for this facility was provided by the Australian Federal
234 Government.

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