



Continuing Experiments of Atmospheric Neutron Effects on Deep Submicron Integrated Circuits

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In the September 2005 issue of IEEE Transactions on Device and Materials Reliability, the article entitled *The Rosetta Experiment: Atmospheric Soft Error Rate Testing in Differing Technology FPGAs* [Ref 1] described real-time experiments that evaluated large Xilinx FPGAs fabricated in two CMOS technologies (150 nm and 130 nm) for their sensitivity to radiation-induced, single-event upsets and detailed the results from simulation, beam testing, and atmospheric testing. These results were compared to circuit simulation (Q_{CRIT}) studies as well as to LANSCE neutron beam results.

This white paper clarifies some open issues from the 2005 Xilinx Rosetta experiments and presents additional results for 90 nm and 65 nm technology nodes.

Introduction

The *Stone of Rosette* by Ulrich Schabe and Richard Wäsch [Ref 2] defines Rosetta as follows:

“Rosetta refers to the crucial breakthrough in the research regarding Egyptian hieroglyphs. It especially represents the “translation” of “silent” symbols into a living language, which is necessary in order to make the whole content of information of these symbols accessible.”

Just as the Rosetta Stone enabled researchers to decode the unsolvable and mysterious Egyptian hieroglyphs by comparing them to the same text written in a known language, the Xilinx Rosetta experiments link two prior known and well-documented techniques of estimating atmospheric neutron single event upsets (SEUs) with the real effects of atmospheric neutrons on integrated circuits. The known techniques are accelerated testing in a neutron or proton beam and software simulation of the circuit to determine the critical charge a particular node or latch can handle before it changes state. These Xilinx experiments determine the actual upset rate of Virtex™ and Spartan™ FPGAs due to an atmospheric neutron cascade, which resulted from a cosmic ray. With a good understanding of the real effect(s) that these atmospheric neutrons have on today’s integrated circuits, Xilinx can validate the design and technology choices being used to mitigate these effects.

Predicting atmospheric neutron flux is not an exact science. In the JEDEC89 standard, there is a methodology that uses models and magnetic latitude data to predict the flux at any given location on the earth. The 2005 Rosetta results clearly did not agree with the JEDEC89 standard, and the JEDEC89 committee worked in collaboration with Xilinx to resolve this issue. Three corrections were made to the JEDEC89 standard (now JEDEC89A):

1. Realization that the proton flux is not insubstantial (it is approximately an additional 7% in San Jose and as much as an additional 32% at Mauna Kea).
2. The attenuation by the building must be more accurately calculated (28% of the flux is lost to the ground floor of a typical Silicon Valley, two-story, tilt-up, concrete structure).
3. A more automated model can be developed to aid investigators (a new prototype web-based tool): <http://www.seutest.com/cgi-bin/FluxCalculator.cgi>.

The JEDEC89A revision also proposes a new atmospheric spectral model, based on work done by Goldhagen, et al [Ref 3].

Experiments

Each Rosetta experiment consisted of multiple sets of 100 of the largest Xilinx FPGAs using differing technologies, located at 10 different altitudes. All tested components were fabricated by UMC or Toshiba in their 300 mm submicron fabrication lines using standard logic CMOS processes and the new Triple Gate Oxide CMOS process.

[Table 1](#) lists the locations of the experiments, and [Table 2](#) lists the device type, technology, and quantity.

Table 1: Locations of Xilinx Rosetta Experiments

| Location | Adjusted Altitude Factor ⁽¹⁾ | Altitude (Feet) |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------|
| San Jose, CA | 0.75 | 257 |
| Marseilles, France | 1.08 | 359 |
| Longmont, CO | 4.11 | 4958 |
| Albuquerque, NM | 3.34 | 5145 |
| Pic du Bure, France | 6.00 | 8196 |
| Pic du Midi, France | 8.62 | 9298 |
| Aiguille du Midi, France | 12.45 | 11289 |
| White Mountain, CA | 19.48 | 12442 |
| Mauna Kea, HI | 11.35 | 13000 |
| Rustrel, France | 0.00 | -1600 |

Notes:

- Adjustments have been made for the influence of minimum solar sunspots on cosmic ray flux.

Table 2: Devices Currently Under Test

| Device Family | Device Number | Technology | Quantity |
|---------------------|---------------|------------|----------|
| Virtex-II FPGAs | XC2V6000 | 150 nm | 300 |
| Virtex-II Pro FPGAs | XC2VP50 | 130 nm | 600 |
| Spartan-3 FPGAs | XC3S1500 | 90 nm | 200 |
| Virtex-4 FPGAs | XC4VLX25 | 90 nm | 400 |
| Virtex-4 FPGAs | XC4VLX60 | 90 nm | 300 |
| Virtex-5 FPGAs | XC5VLX110 | 65 nm | 300 |

Test times at Rustrel, France [\[Ref 4\]](#) (which is 550 meters directly below the summit of a hill, and hence completely shielded from cosmic rays) have reached 2.35E6 device hours, and the alpha upset rate is 35 FIT/Mb⁽¹⁾. There has been one upset to date. Because these devices used ultra low alpha lead, the configuration cell upset rate due to alphas in the packaging was expected to be much less than 100 FIT/Mb. The manufacturing flow seems to have met this objective.

In the IC design of the Xilinx FPGAs, the individual memory cells (implemented as static latches) used for configuration, look-up tables, and block RAM were all simulated for their sensitivity to single event upsets.

1. FIT/Mb = failures per billion hours per Megabit.

To detect alpha contamination in packaging and assembly, the experimental groups were rotated through the three altitudes in addition to using the underground facility. Any evidence of a constant upset rate due to alpha particles would be observed as a non-altitude, non-latitude dependent factor in the resulting upsets, or measured directly at Rustrel.

Atmospheric Test Results

Table 3 summarizes the atmospheric test results for all four technologies. The error rate is stated either in failures in time per billion hours or in mean time between events in hours, days, or years. A functional failure of the user data due to the single event upset rate then becomes mean time between functional failure in hours, days, or years. *Estimation of Single Event Upset Probability Impact of FPGA Designs [Ref 5]* discusses the relationship between the mean time between failure (MTBF) configuration bit and mean time between functional failure, which is exactly SEUPI⁽¹⁾. More commonly, the SEUPI factor is known as the derating factor (not every flip causes a failure).

Table 3: Atmospheric Test Results by Technology

| | 150 nm ⁽¹⁾ | 130 nm ⁽²⁾ | 90 nm (Virtex-4 FPGAs ⁽³⁾) | 65 nm (Virtex-5 FPGAs ⁽⁴⁾) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| Configuration Memory | | | | |
| Data Failure Rate | 401 FIT/Mb ⁽⁵⁾ | 384 FIT/Mb ⁽⁶⁾ | 246 FIT/Mb ⁽⁶⁾ | 151 FIT/Mb ⁽⁶⁾ |
| 95% Confidence Interval | 367 to 435 FIT/Mb | 339 to 429 FIT/Mb | 199 to 301 FIT/Mb | 101 to 215 FIT/Mb |
| Block RAM | | | | |
| Data Failure Rate | 397 FIT/Mb | 614 FIT/Mb | 352 FIT/Mb | 635 FIT/Mb |
| 95% Confidence Interval | 317 to 491 FIT/Mb | 515 to 713 FIT/Mb | 236 to 506 FIT/Mb | 428 to 907 FIT/Mb |

Notes:

1. 150 nm results based on 629 events and 154.71 Gb years of data.
2. 130 nm results based on 447 events and 88.37 Gb years of data.
3. Virtex-4 FPGAs utilize 130 nm CMOS transistors for the configuration memory and 90 nm transistors for the block RAM.
4. Virtex-5 FPGAs utilize 90 nm CMOS transistors for the configuration memory and 65 nm transistors for the block RAM.
5. 1 FIT is one bit flip in a billion hours.
6. Without SEUPI derating.

1. SEUPI = single event upset probability impact.

Q_{CRIT} Simulation Results

The Xilinx IC design group uses models and methods from Xilinx fabrication partners to estimate the potential sensitivity of the memory cells to upsets. These models and methods have been used in their production of standard products and ASICs. Their prediction of Q_{CRIT} to atmospheric upsets is used to compare with Xilinx observations in the Rosetta experiment. Table 4 shows the Q_{CRIT} simulation results.

Table 4: FIT/Mb based on Q_{CRIT} vs. Technology Node

| Q _{CRIT} /Node | Configuration | Block RAM |
|-------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 150 nm | 101 FIT/Mb | 105 FIT/Mb |
| 130 nm | 106 FIT/Mb | 114 FIT/Mb |
| 90 nm (Virtex-4 FPGAs) | 61 FIT/Mb | 222 FIT/Mb |
| 65 nm (Virtex-5 FPGAs) | 88 FIT/Mb | 441 FIT/Mb |

Accelerator Test Facilities

In the past, the best resource available to simulate atmospheric neutrons had been the high-energy Neutron Testing Facility at the Los Alamos Neutron Science Center (LANSCE). At LANSCE, high-energy neutrons are produced by spallation. A linear accelerator produces an 800 MeV pulsed proton beam that strikes a water-cooled tungsten target. The impact produces a spectrum of neutrons whose energy distribution and intensity is precisely measured. This spectrum is very similar in shape to the atmospheric spectrum. The flight path consists of a small building for the irradiation that also encloses the testing equipment, isolated from the beam by a substantial concrete barrier. The devices to be tested are placed in the neutron beam line (in air) in the irradiation building. The experimenters control the neutron beam by opening and closing a shutter external to the irradiation building, and the number of neutrons on the sample is continuously monitored and recorded. Corrections to flux for the $1/R^2$ distance from the source must be included.

Recently, additional tests have been performed at TSL in Stockholm (pseudo-white neutron spectrum at different peak energies) and at the ISIS facility in the United Kingdom. In multiple visits to these locations, the data is self-consistent, but yields a different numerical result for a cross section of identical parts, tested under identical conditions. Six of the 150 nm technology devices (XC2V6000) have visited these locations, where the cross sections for configuration bits are:

| | |
|--------|--------------------------------|
| LANSCE | 2.56E-14 ± 10% |
| TSL | 3.38E-14, 2.41E-14 to 4.35E-14 |
| ISIS | 4.35E-14 ± 5% |

Accuracies are calculated either by variations in the results over many visits (more than 13 for LANSCE), from spectrum folding calculations (TSL) or from particle counter stated accuracy (ISIS), and represent the 95% confidence intervals. All tests had more than 5,000 actual upsets each, so that the inaccuracies due to counting of the number of events are less than ±1% for 95% confidence interval.

In the future, companies might have to use more than one beam facility due to beam availability issues. Xilinx has been using the 150 nm technology results as a *golden standard* for use in calibrating the results. This method is reliable because other technologies are measured at the same time in the same beam.

LANSCE Results

Testing was performed at LANSCE on multiple occasions. [Table 5](#) summarizes the results for Virtex-II, Virtex-II Pro, Virtex-4, and Virtex-5 FPGAs. Virtex-II FPGA tests utilized XC2V6000 devices. The XC2V6000, tested in every test, is used to *calibrate* the beam flux at both ends of the experiment (flux entering versus flux leaving).

Table 5: Summary of LANSCE Results

| | Virtex-II FPGAs (XC2V6) | Virtex-II Pro FPGAs (XC2VP) | Virtex-4 FPGAs (XC4VLX) | Virtex-5 FPGAs (XC5VLX) |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Number of Occasions | Every ⁽¹⁾ | 4 | 8 | 2 |
| Median Configuration Cross Section | 2.56E-14 | 2.74E-14 | 1.55E-14 | 6.67E-15 |
| Median Block RAM Cross Section | 2.64E-14 | 3.91E-14 | 2.74E-14 | 3.96E-14 |

Notes:

1. 13 visits as of this publication.

Conclusions from Recent Beam Testing

As the hardness to atmospheric neutrons improves, fewer upsets in the beam testing also occur, which affects the accuracy of the results, requiring longer beam exposures or resulting in higher statistical uncertainty.

It is not possible to make a statement about foundry, process, voltage, or temperature effects without side-by-side experiments in the same beam, at the same time, with a few thousand upsets on each. All data in the LANSCE results above meets these criteria.

The LANSCE facility now operates at one-third reduced beam power, so that one gets only a fraction of the number of upsets in the time allotted. It might not be possible to gather enough data depending on the upset rate and the beam time allotted.

Conclusion

This white paper presents updated data on the Xilinx Rosetta experiments for 150 nm and 130 nm processes, the 90 nm triple oxide process (Virtex-4 FPGAs), and the 65 nm triple oxide process (Virtex-5 FPGAs). The newer data with the 90 nm and the 65 nm processes shows how the used simulation methods were not effective.

Note: Spartan-3 FPGA results were not available at the time of this publication.

[Table 6](#) compares simulation (Q_{CRIT}), sea-level JEDEC89A scaled data (LANSCE derived), and atmospheric results (Rosetta).

Table 6: FIT/Mb Comparison by Method and Technology

| FIT/Mb | Virtex-II FPGAs (XC2V) | Virtex-II Pro FPGAs (XC2VP) | Virtex-4 FPGAs (XC4VLX) ⁽¹⁾ | Virtex-5 FPGAs (XC5VLX) ⁽²⁾ |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Configuration Memory | 150 nm | 130 nm | 90 nm | 65 nm |
| Q_{CRIT} | 101 | 106 | 61 | 88 |
| LANSCE | 330 | 353 | 200 | 86 |
| Rosetta | 401 | 384 | 246 | 151 |
| Block RAM | 150 nm | 130 nm | 90 nm | 65 nm |
| Q_{CRIT} | 105 | 114 | 222 | 441 |
| LANSCE | 341 | 504 | 353 | 511 |
| Rosetta | 397 | 614 | 352 | 635 |

Notes:

1. Virtex-4 FPGAs utilize 130 nm CMOS transistors for the configuration memory and 90 nm transistors for the block RAM.
2. Virtex-5 FPGAs utilize 90 nm CMOS transistors for the configuration memory and 65 nm transistors for the block RAM.

The Q_{CRIT} simulations do not provide any insight into the predicted performance of the next technology. The Q_{CRIT} simulation results collected from the chosen methods show increasing inaccuracy, starting with the 90 nm technology node (see [Table 4, page 5](#)). Work done by others ([\[Ref 6\]](#), [\[Ref 7\]](#)) shows a much better correlation from simulation to beam testing. Given that beam testing is suspect due to the inaccuracies, a question arises as to whether or not more advanced simulation techniques can predict atmospheric (actual) results.

The LANSCE results (as converted from a cross section to FIT/Mb per JEDEC89A) provide some indication of the impact of the design and the technology node. The atmospheric test results (Rosetta) show the actual customer experience.

Improvements in the JEDEC89A standard have provided a better means to estimate the atmospheric acceleration factors and local attenuation by building materials to a finer degree. However, they remain estimates and must be treated as such.

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Revision History

The following table shows the revision history for this document:

| Date | Version | Description of Revisions |
|----------|---------|--|
| 03/10/08 | 1.0 | Initial Xilinx release. |
| 05/22/09 | 1.0.1 | Changed footnote 1 on page 3. Was: FIT/Mb = failures per million hours per Megabit. Is: FIT/Mb = failures per billion hours per Megabit. |

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