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Report written:
July 1952

LA-1446

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Per B Palatinus, FSS-16 Date: 11/8/95
By [illegible], CIC-14 Date: 12/20/95

This document consists of 12 pages

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TOTAL CROSS SECTIONS FOR 14-Mev NEUTRONS

by

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LA-1446

Los Alamos Report Library	1-20
J R. Oppenheimer	21
Argonne National Laboratory	22-29
Armed Forces Special Weapons Project (Sandia)	30
Armed Forces Special Weapons Project (Washington)	31
Atomic Energy Commission, Washington	32-37
Brookhaven National Laboratory	38-40
Bureau of Ships	41
Carbide and Carbon Chemicals Company (K-25 Plant)	42-43
Carbide and Carbon Chemicals Company (ORNL)	44-51
Carbide and Carbon Chemicals Company (Y-12 Area)	52-53
Chicago Patent Group	54
Chief of Naval Research	55
Columbia University (Havens)	56
duPont Company	57-61
General Electric Company (ANPP)	62-63
General Electric Company, Richland	64-67
Hanford Operations Office	68
Idaho Operations Office	69-70
Iowa State College	71
Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory	72-75
Mound Laboratory	76-78
National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics	79
Naval Research Laboratory	80
New York Operations Office	81-82
North American Aviation, Inc.	83-85
Nuclear Development Associates (NDA)	86
Patent Branch, Washington	87
Savannah River Operations Office (Wilmington)	88
USAF - Headquarters	89
U.S. Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory	90
UCLA Medical Research Laboratory (Warren)	91
University of California Radiation Laboratory	92-94
University of Rochester	95-96
Westinghouse Electric Corporation	97-100
Wright Air Development Center	101-104
Technical Information Service, Oak Ridge	105-119
Rand Corporation	120
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Benedict)	121
California Research and Development Company	122-123

[redacted]

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ABSTRACT

The total cross sections of over 50 elements were measured in good geometry for 14-Mev neutrons. A plot of the square root of the total cross section versus the one-third power of the atomic weight shows deviations from the linear relationship predicted by statistical theory. The deviations are most pronounced for the heaviest elements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are indebted to F. H. Spedding for the loan of samples of yttrium oxide and praseodymium metal. We wish to thank L. K. Goodwin for help in preparing most of the samples and J. S. Wahl for building the detector.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the methods for determining nuclear radii is based on measurements of the total cross sections of nuclei for fast neutrons. Nuclear radii are most likely to be calculable from such measurements if the neutron wave length divided by 2π is small compared to the nuclear radius, but not small enough that the nucleus is transparent for the neutrons used. Neutrons of energies of the order of 20 Mev satisfy these conditions. Several measurements using neutrons of energies between 13 and 25 Mev have been published[1-6] and have served to determine nuclear radii. Each investigation covers a relatively small number of elements. Measurements performed at different neutron energies and in different geometries are difficult to compare, particularly because of the strong angular dependence of diffraction scattering about which only very limited information is available.

All the published measurements at neutron energies of the order of 20 Mev are compatible with the assumption that for nuclei heavier than Be the nuclear radius is a linear function of the one-third power of the number of nucleons in the nucleus. The present investigation was undertaken to study such possible deviations from this relationship as might perhaps occur in nuclei with closed shells. For this purpose the cross sections of all readily available elements were measured for neutrons of the same energy and in about the same geometry. The uniformity of the technique used for all the elements serves to increase the precision of the cross section versus atomic weight relationship and hence might facilitate the interpretation of the data.

PROCEDURE

Fast neutrons were produced by bombarding a thick Zr-T target with 220-kev diatomic deuterium ions. The direction of observation was at an angle of 88° with respect to the deuteron beam. In this direction the neutrons have an energy of 14.12 ± 0.04 Mev, assuming a reaction energy of 17.58 ± 0.02 Mev for the D-T reaction.

A trans-stilbene scintillator served as neutron detector. It was placed at a distance of 165 cm from the neutron source. In order to check the sensitivity of the detector to γ-rays or neutrons which do not come directly from the target, a copper bar, 1 in. in diameter and 25 in. long, was inserted between source and detector. It was found that the background counting rate in the presence of the bar divided by the counting rate produced by the direct neutron flux decreased as the setting of the pulse height discriminator was increased. The discriminator bias was set high enough to keep the background below 1 percent. This setting

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corresponded to a proton recoil energy of about 10 Mev.

The neutron source strength was monitored both by counting associated α-particles from the D-T reaction and by a second scintillation neutron detector. No systematic differences between the two monitors were observed.

Total cross sections were measured by simple transmission experiments in good geometry. The samples were placed halfway between the source and detector. The thickness of the samples was chosen to give transmissions of about 50 percent. Most of the samples had a diameter of 1 in. In this geometry the transmission experiment measures the total cross section except for neutrons scattered elastically (or inelastically with small energy loss) through angles less than about 2°. It is assumed that within this angle the neutrons scattered into the detector by the sample compensate those neutrons which are scattered out of the direct path from source to detector. If the scattering were isotropic, 0.02 percent of the scattered neutrons would hit the detector. The diffraction scattering will produce a forward maximum in the distribution of the elastically scattered neutrons which results for the heaviest nuclei in an intensity about 70 times larger than if the neutrons were scattered isotropically, so that the largest inscattering correction to be expected would be about 0.8 percent, assuming that elastic scattering constitutes one-half of all the interactions. A correction for inscattering of $0.13\,\sigma_t$ percent was applied to the data, where σ_t is the measured total cross section in barns. This correction is based on a value of $k^2R^4/4$ for the differential scattering cross section in the forward direction[7] where k is the wave number of the incident neutrons and R the nuclear radius. Use of the value $(kR + 1)^4/4k^2$, instead of $k^2R^4/4$, as indicated in a summary report by other authors[8] would make the corrections for the heavy elements larger by a factor of approximately 2.

Whenever possible the samples were made of the pure element. In Table I the elements investigated are listed together with the form in which the element was used. Gas samples were contained in cylinders 40 in. long and 15/16 in. inner diameter of stainless steel of 1/32 in. wall thickness. The inscattering corrections for these samples, although larger than for non-gaseous samples of similar atomic weight, were still negligible.

RESULTS

In Table 1 the measured total cross sections corrected for background and scattering into the detector are tabulated, and in Fig. 1 the results are plotted against atomic weights. The statistical accuracy of the measurements is about 1 percent except in the cases in which compounds were used and in the case of Pr where only a very thin sample was available.

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While precautions were taken to obtain samples of high purity and uniform density, errors introduced by the properties of the samples may be of the same order of magnitude as the statistical errors.

In the last two columns of Table I the results obtained previously by others are listed. While the agreement with the present data is within the experimental error in most cases, there are a few instances of rather large differences. These discrepancies may be due to the fact that some of the elements have only recently become available in pure form.

Feshbach and Weisskopf[9] have proposed a schematic theory of nuclear cross sections which should be applicable for neutrons of the energy used in the present experiment. According to this theory the square root of the total cross section should be approximately a linear function of the nuclear radius. To facilitate a comparison between the calculated and observed cross sections, $\sqrt{\sigma_t/2\pi}$ is plotted in Fig. 2 against the cube roots of atomic weights, A. The solid line shown in Fig. 2 shows the dependence of the cross sections on nuclear radius calculated according to reference 9 with the assumption that the nuclear radius is related to the atomic weight by $R = 1.5 \times 10^{-13} \times A^{1/3}$ cm.

While the experimental points lie on a fairly smooth curve, systematic deviations from the calculated relationship between σ and A are apparent in Fig. 2. No appreciable improvement in the fit is obtained by changing the coefficient in the dependence of R on $A^{1/3}$. Deviations from the predicted curve might be expected for the lightest elements, since statistical theory is probably not applicable to them. Apart from the lightest elements the largest differences between calculated and observed cross sections occur for the elements above the rare earths.

There is no apparent effect of closed shells on the nuclear radius; for example, Tl, Pb^{206}, and Pb^{208} have within experimental error the same total cross sections. This finding is at variance with the results of Lasday[3] and with the analysis by Curie[10] based on data taken at higher neutron energies.

It should perhaps not be surprising that the theory of Feshbach and Weisskopf does not give a precise quantitative fit to the experiments, since this theory is based on a rather special assumption about the radial dependence of the neutron wave function inside the nucleus. It would probably be possible to fit the data more quantitatively by a theory which has more adjustable parameters, as was done for example by Fernbach, Serber, and Taylor[11] to account for the experimental results at 90 Mev.

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Table I

Total Cross Sections for 14-Mev Neutrons

Z	Element	A	Sample Form	σ_t (barns)	Previous Reports	Reference
1	H	1	Gas		0.686 ± 0.007 0.689 ± 0.005	(4) (5)
1	H	3	Gas		0.975 ± 0.007	(4)
2	He	4	Gas		1.02 ± 0.02	(4)
3	Li	6	Cast	1.39 ± 0.05		
3	Li	7	M	1.45 ± 0.03		
4	Be	9	M	1.53 ± 0.03	0.65 ± 0.04 1.41 ± 0.11	(1) (3)
5	B	10	Powder	1.47 ± 0.03		
5	B	11	Powder	1.40 ± 0.03	1.16 ± 0.13	(1)
6	C	12	Graphite	1.32 ± 0.02	1.23 ± 0.02 1.24 ± 0.06 1.279 ± 0.004 1.29 ± 0.02	(1) (3) (5) (6)
7	N	14	Gas	1.59 ± 0.03	1.7 ± 0.1 1.39 ± 0.05	(5) (6)
8	O	16	Gas	1.59 ± 0.03	1.64 ± 0.04 1.61 ± 0.04	(5) (6)
8	O	16	H_2O	1.56 ± 0.04		
9	F	19	CF_2	1.70 ± 0.05		
11	Na	23	Compacted	1.71 ± 0.03		
12	Mg	24.3	M	1.75 ± 0.03	1.83 ± 0.10	(1)
13	Al	27	M	1.73 ± 0.03	1.92 ± 0.09	(1)
14	Si	28.1	Compacted	1.83 ± 0.04		
14	Si	28.1	SiO_2	1.90 ± 0.13		
15	P	31	Cast	1.97 ± 0.04		
16	S	32.1	Cast	1.92 ± 0.04	1.58 ± 0.10	(1)
17	Cl	35.5	CCl_4	2.00 ± 0.05		
19	K	39.1	Compacted	2.24 ± 0.04		
20	Ca	40.1	Compacted	2.19 ± 0.04		
22	Ti	47.9	M	2.28 ± 0.04	2.24 ± 0.29	(3)
24	Cr	52.0	Compacted	2.45 ± 0.04		
25	Mn	54.9	Compacted	2.54 ± 0.05		

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Table I (Continued)

Z	Element	A	Sample Form	σ_t (barns)	Previous Reports	Reference
26	Fe	55.9	M	2.60 ± 0.05	2.75 ± 0.09	(1)
27	Co	58.9	Compacted	2.72 ± 0.05		
28	Ni	58.7	M	2.67 ± 0.05	2.62 ± 0.09	(1)
29	Cu	63.5	M	2.96 ± 0.06	2.86 ± 0.15 2.85 ± 0.05	(1) (6)
30	Zn	65.4	Cast	3.06 ± 0.06	3.03 ± 0.17	(1)
31	Ga	69.7	Cast	3.19 ± 0.06		
34	Se	79.2	Powder	3.56 ± 0.07	3.35 ± 0.20	(1)
35	Br	79.9	Liquid	3.52 ± 0.07		
38	Sr	87.6	Compacted	3.68 ± 0.07		
39	Y	88.9	Y_2O_3	3.88 ± 0.14		
40	Zr	91.2	Compacted	4.00 ± 0.08	2.37 ± 0.35	(3)
41	Nb	93.3	Compacted	4.02 ± 0.08		
42	Mo	96.0	M	4.04 ± 0.08		
47	Ag	107.9	Cast	4.34 ± 0.09	3.82 ± 0.13	(1)
48	Cd	112.4	Cast	4.44 ± 0.09	4.25 ± 0.13	(1)
49	In	114.8	Cast	4.53 ± 0.09		
50	Sn	118.7	Compacted	4.68 ± 0.09	4.52 ± 0.14	(1)
51	Sb	121.8	Compacted	4.71 ± 0.09	4.35 ± 0.15	(1)
52	Te	127.6	Compacted	4.85 ± 0.10		
53	I	126.9	Compacted	4.74 ± 0.10		
56	Ba	137.4	Compacted	5.17 ± 0.10		
57	La	138.9	Compacted	5.18 ± 0.10		
58	Ce	140.1	M	5.08 ± 0.10		
59	Pr	140.9	M	4.93 ± 0.25		
73	Ta	180.9	M	5.24 ± 0.10		
74	W	183.9	M	5.30 ± 0.11		
78	Pt	195.2	Cast	5.36 ± 0.11		
79	Au	197.2	M	5.31 ± 0.11	4.68 ± 0.9	(1)
80	Hg	200.6	Liquid	5.36 ± 0.11	5.64 ± 0.24	(1)
81	Tl	204.4	Cast	5.36 ± 0.11		
82	Pb	206	Cast	5.40 ± 0.11		

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Table I (Continued)

Z	Element	A	Sample Form	σ_t (barns)	Previous Reports	Reference
82	Pb	207.2	M	5.48 ± 0.11	5.05 ± 0.15 4.97 ± 0.27	(1) (3)
83	Bi	209.0	Cast	5.46 ± 0.11	5.17 ± 0.17	(1)
90	Th	232.1	M	5.69 ± 0.11	6.11 ± 0.33	(3)
92	U	233	Cast		6.03 ± 0.25	(4)
92	U	235	Cast	5.76 ± 0.11		
92	U	238.1	M	5.87 ± 0.12		
94	Pu	239	Cast	5.91 ± 0.12		

M denotes samples which were machined from bulk metal. Most of the cast and compacted samples were also machined to accurate dimensions.

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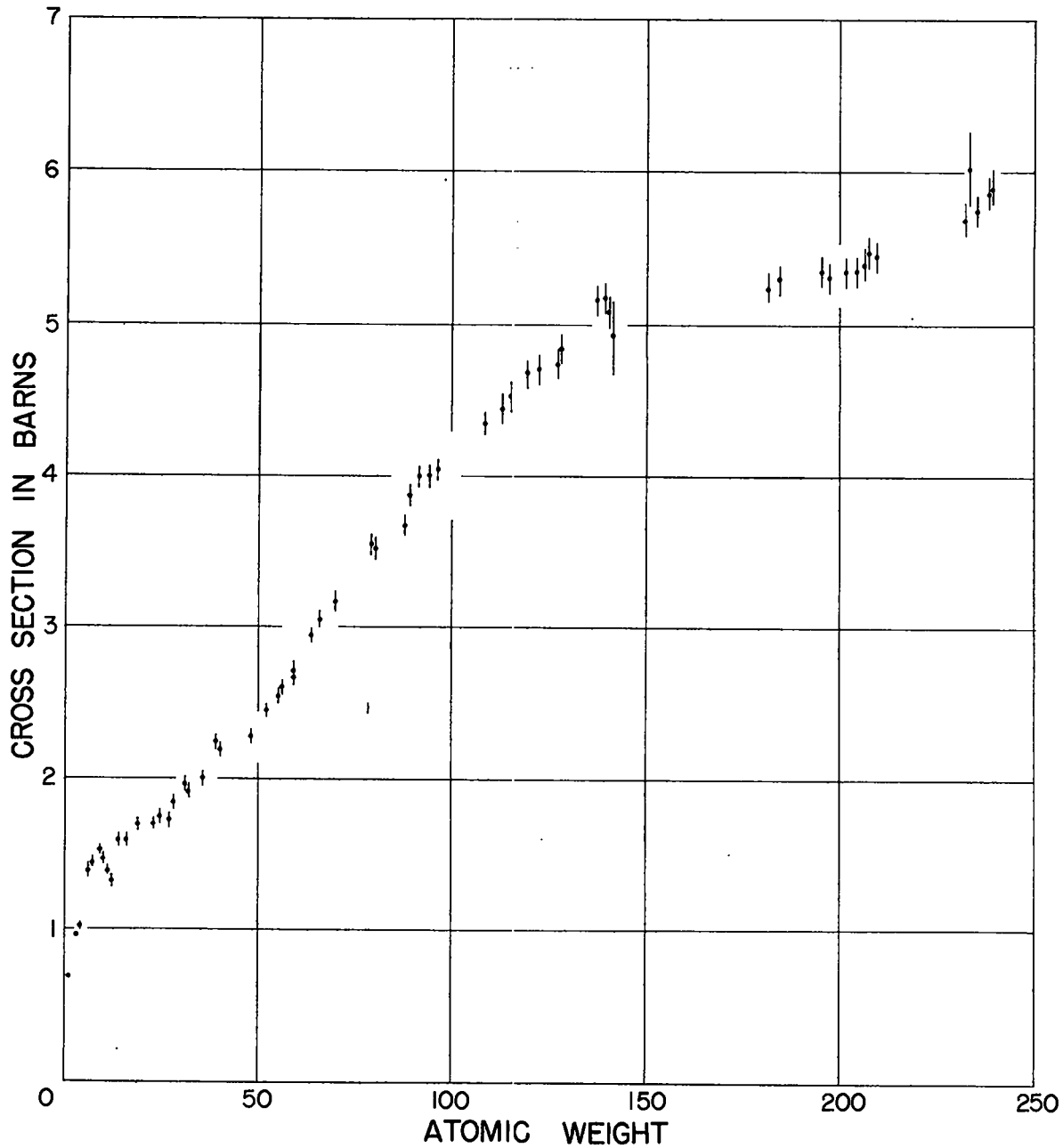

Fig. 1. The total cross sections of the elements for 14-Mev neutrons plotted against atomic weight.

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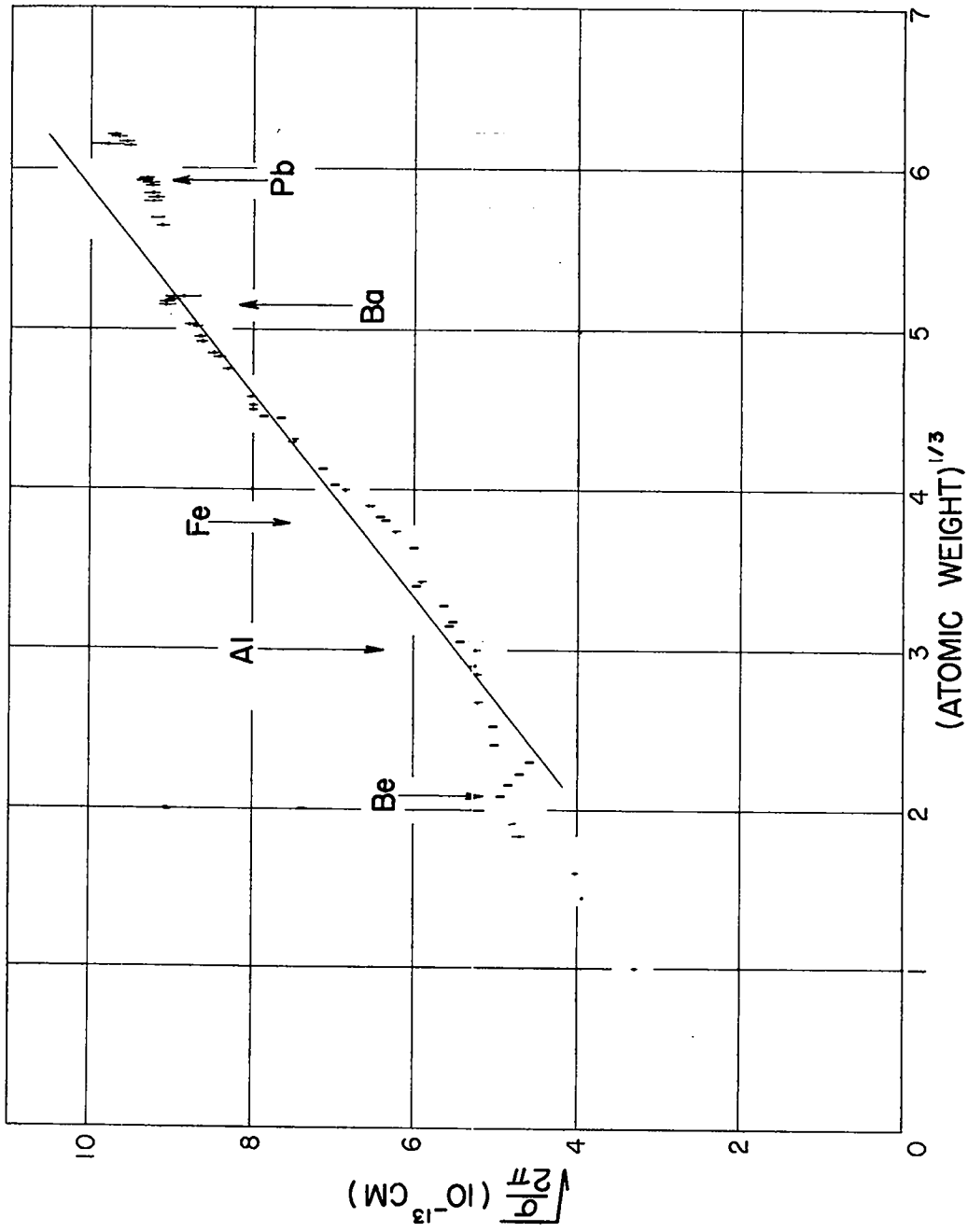

Fig. 2. Square root of the total cross sections divided by 2π plotted against the cube root of the atomic weight. The solid line represents the behavior predicted by the theory of Feshbach and Weisskopf under the assumption that the nuclear radius is given by $1.5 \times A^{1/3} \times 10^{-13}$ cm.

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