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Ultrafast Structural Changes in Chiral Molecules Measured with Free-Electron Lasers

P Schmidt^{1,2}, V Music^{1,2}, G Hartmann¹, R Boll², B Erk³, S Bari³, F Allum⁴, T M Baumann², G Brenner³, M Brouard⁴, M Burt⁴, R Coffee⁵, S Dörner³, A Galler², P Grychtol², D Heathcote⁴, L Inhester⁶, M Kazemi³, M Larsson⁷, J Lee⁴, Z Li⁶, A Lutmann⁵, B Manschwetus³, L Marder¹, R Mason⁴, S Moeller⁵, T Osipov⁵, H Otto¹, C Passow³, D Rolles⁸, P Rupprecht⁹, K Schubert³, L Schwob³, R Thomas⁷, C Vallance⁴, C von Korff Schmising¹⁰, R Wagner², P Walter⁵, T J A Wolf¹¹, V Zhaunerchyk¹², M Meyer², A Ehresmann¹, A Knie¹, Ph V Demekhin¹ and M Ilchen^{1,2* * *}

¹ University of Kassel, Institut für Physik, Heinrich-Plett-Straße 40, 34132 Kassel, Germany

² European XFEL GmbH, Holzkoppel 4, 22869 Schenefeld, Germany

³ Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron (DESY), Notkestraße 85, 22607 Hamburg, Germany

⁴ University of Oxford, The Department of Chemistry, Oxford OX1 2JD, UK

⁵ SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, 2575 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, California 94025, USA

⁶ Center for Free-Electron Laser Science (CFEL), Notkestraße 85, 22607 Hamburg, Germany

⁷ University of Stockholm, Alba Nova Institute, Roslagstullsbacken 21, 114 21 Stockholm, Sweden

⁸ Kansas State University, 1228 N 17th St, KS 66506, United States

⁹ Max-Planck-Institut für Kernphysik Heidelberg, Saupfercheckweg 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany

¹⁰ Max Born Institute, Max-Born-Straße 2A, 12489 Berlin, Germany

¹¹ PULSE at Stanford, 2575 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, California 94025, USA

¹² University of Gothenburg, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden

Synopsis (X-ray) free-electron lasers are employed to site specifically interrogate atomic fragments during ultrafast photolysis of chiral molecules via time-resolved photoelectron circular dichroism.

The method of photoelectron circular dichroism (PECD) has been shown to be a powerful tool for chiral recognition over the last two decades[1, 2]. It provides up to orders of magnitude stronger effects than normal CD. The observable forward-backward asymmetry in the angular distribution of photoelectrons emitted from a chiral system is very sensitive to the electron energy and also to (ultrafast) changes of the underlying charge distribution. This has been demonstrated for vibrational excitations[3], multiphoton interactions[4] and ultrafast structural changes[5]. Such exceptional sensitivity of PECD opens unique perspectives for addressing nonlinear and ultrafast phenomena with VUV and X-ray free-electron lasers that can uniquely enable site selective interrogation of an observing (e.g. dissociating) atomic site. However, such pump-probe experiments on chiral systems are challenging in terms of their technical, physical and (stereo-)chemical complexity.

In the presented work, we show first approaches from the free-electron lasers LCLS (USA) and FLASH (Germany) to measure the

*E-mail: ilchen@physik.uni-kassel.de

time-resolved (TR-)PECD in chiral model systems, i.e. trifluoromethyloxirane ($C_3H_3F_3O$)[6] and iodomethylbutane($C_5H_{11}I$), respectively.

To measure the TR-PECD of these prototypical chiral molecules during (UV) laser or X-ray triggered fragmentation (pump), highly intense, circularly polarized XUV free-electron laser pulses were used as probe. The presentation will primarily focus on a recent experiment at FLASH (10/2018), where we employed a two-sided velocity map imaging spectrometer in order to obtain electron-ion correlations from a dissociating chiral system. In this case, atomic iodine is ejected from enantiomeric iodomethylbutane, serving as dynamic observer site for monitoring the evolving chirality of the residual molecule on a femtosecond timescale.

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