Local Magnetism and Spin Dynamics of the Frustrated Honeycomb Rhodate Li$_2$RhO$_3$

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We report magnetization, heat capacity, $^7$Li nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and muon-spin rotation ($\mu$SR) measurements on the honeycomb 4d$^5$ spin liquid candidate Li$_2$RhO$_3$. The magnetization in small magnetic fields provides evidence for a partial spin freezing of a small fraction of Rh$^{4+}$ moments at 6 K whereas the Curie-Weiss behavior above 100 K suggests a pseudo-spin-1/2 paramagnet with a moment of about 2.2 $\mu_B$. The magnetic specific heat ($C_m$) exhibits no field dependence and demonstrates the absence of long range magnetic order down to 0.35 K. $C_m/T$ passes through a broad maximum at about 10 K and $C_m \propto T^2$ at low temperature. Measurements of the spin-lattice relaxation rate ($1/T_1$) reveal a gapless slowing down of spin fluctuations on cooling with $1/T_1 \sim T^{5.2}$. The results from NMR and $\mu$SR are consistent in a scenario in which a minority of Rh$^{4+}$ moments are in a short-range correlated frozen state and coexist with a majority of moments in a liquid-like state that continue to fluctuate at low temperature.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The physics of $S = \frac{1}{2}$ quantum magnets (QM) is extremely rich, owing to the variety of magnetic exchange interactions in different systems, as determined by the lattice geometry and the orbital hybridization$^{12}$. Systems studied so far include quasi 1D-linear chains, planar 2D-systems (ladders, kagome-layers, triangles or square lattices) or more complex 3D-structures such as the hyperkagome or pyrochlore lattices. Recently, the field of $S = \frac{1}{4}$ quantum magnetism has been extended away from 3d ions (such as those containing Cu$^{2+}$ or V$^{4+}$ ions) towards 4d and 5d systems$^{2}$. In these materials, an effective $j_{\text{eff}} = \frac{1}{4}$ moment can be realized due to strong spin orbit coupling (SOC) and in certain compounds the presence of frustration is suspected to lead to a quantum spin liquid (QSL) ground state$^3$. In general, having the energy of the SOC, the Coulomb interaction (parameterised by $U$) and the crystal electric field splitting (CEF) of the same order of magnitude leads to highly degenerate magnetic states and complex excitations for many 4d and 4d QMs. These excitations can be gapless or gapped, but their nature is complicated by the presence of disorder and anisotropic interactions, and their understanding is hindered by the scarcity of model materials$^{13,14}$. One approach to describe the highly degenerate states in such frustrated systems utilizes a fermionic band-like picture with chargeless spinons ($S = \frac{1}{4}$) excitations. The fermionic spinon concept was first introduced in cuprates$^{15}$ and for organic Cu-based QSLs$^{25}$. It was later established in other QMs, such as spin chains$^{16}$, 2D-systems$^{17,18}$ and 3D-networks including pyrochlore lattice$^{19,20}$.

The honeycomb 4d and 5d planar QMs have become attractive systems to study following the discovery of graphene, a honeycomb, 2D Dirac semimetal (SM); its unique properties stem from its linear dispersive modes ($E \sim k$) and its $T$-linear density of states at the Fermi level $N(E_F)$$^{21}$. These properties lead to a $T^2$-behavior in the electronic specific heat ($\propto TN(E_F)$) and a $T^3$-power law for the spin-lattice relaxation rate $1/T_1(\propto TN^2(E_F))$$^{22,23}$. By analogy 2D-honeycomb QSLs, with linear dispersive fermionic spinon bands and low energy gapless magnetic excitations (spinons or Majorana fermions), are expected to exhibit a $T^2$-behavior in the magnetic specific heat$^{24,25}$ and also power-law spin-lattice relaxation: $1/T_1 \sim T^{15,26}$.

The theoretically-solvable Heisenberg-Kitaev model$^{27,28}$ predicts that a honeycomb lattice decorated with $j_{\text{eff}} = \frac{1}{4}$ pseudospins can have a QSL ground state. Experimental realizations of this include (Li,Na)$_2$IrO$_3$, and $\alpha$-RuCl$_3$$^{29-31}$. Na$_2$IrO$_3$ displays zig-zag magnetic ordering, while $\alpha$-Li$_2$IrO$_3$ exhibits incommensurate spiral ordering. $\alpha$-RuCl$_3$ exhibits a complex magnetic ordered state while recent NMR results suggest a gapping out of magnetic excitations towards low temperatures once the order is suppressed by magnetic field$^{30,31}$. Surprisingly, the structural 4d-homologue Li$_2$RhO$_3$ also shows insulating behavior in spite of reduced spin-orbit interactions$^{24}$ and even more interestingly this system exhibits no sign of long range magnetic ordering (LRO), unlike its Ir counterpart$^{29}$. Magnetic exchange between Rh$^{4+}$ ions are expected to be highly frustrated, which makes this pseudospin $j_{\text{eff}} = \frac{1}{4}$ system a promising candidate for a Kitaev quantum spin liquid. Here we provide a comprehensive account of the local magnetic properties of Li$_2$RhO$_3$ probed by $^7$Li ($I = 3/2$) NMR and $\mu$SR accompanied by magnetization and heat capacity measurements down to 0.4 K.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Polycrystalline samples of Li$_2$RhO$_3$ were synthesized by a method described elsewhere (see the supplemental information$^{29}$). Shown in Fig. 1(a) is the temperature dependence of the d.c.-magnetic susceptibility $\chi(T)$ measured following zero-field cooled (ZFC) and field-cooled (FC) proto-
cols at 10 mT. The ZFC and the FC $\chi(T)$ curves split at 6 K, which may arise from short range magnetic order (SRO) due to a partial freezing of Rh-moments. However, the splitting in $\chi(T)$ is small, which indicates that probably only a small fraction of moments participate in the glassy state. SRO effects (“spin freezing”) admixed onto the quantum spin liquid state have been discussed in quite a large number of materials, such as Na$_2$IrO$_3$ and Ni$_2$Ga$_2$S$_4$.$^{23,50}$ The Curie-Weiss (CW) fit (Fig. 1b) in the range $100 \leq T \leq 300$ K yields an effective moment of 2.2 $\mu_B$ per Rh- ion. This is well above the spin-only value for the $S = \frac{1}{2}$ low-spin configuration of the 4d$^5$-state of Rh$^{4+}$, which points towards a moderate spin orbit coupling.$^{47,51,52}$ The negative sign of the Curie Weiss temperature $\theta_{CW} = -60$ K suggests the prominence of antiferromagnetic (AFM) correlations between Rh$^{4+}$-moments. The exchange interaction between the nearest neighbor Rh$^{4+}$-moments can be determined from the high temperature series expansion (HTSE) frequently used for honeycomb lattices with moderate SOC (such as 4d$^5$ Ru$^{3+}$ ions in $\alpha$-RuCl$_3$). The HTSE yields an AFM interaction of $J/\kappa_B \approx 75 \pm 5$ K and is in reasonable agreement with that obtained from the mean field approximation (MFA)$^{43,53}$ The a.c.-susceptibility exhibits a peak at about $T_g \approx 6$ K$^{54}$ and the peak positions are weakly frequency dependent, showing the role of dissipative spin dynamics in driving such a short range spin freezing mechanism. The origin of this partial spin freezing might be related to the presence of local disorder in the lattice of Li$_2$RhO$_3$.$^{41,45,59}$ The Curie-Weiss temperature $\theta_{CW}$ shows the absolute temperature dependence and the solid line represents a $T^2$-dependence of the magnetic entropy $S_m = \int C_m/T \, dT$ up to 45 K was found to be only 35% [$\approx 2.04 \, \text{J} / \text{mol} \cdot \text{K}$, Fig. 2(b)] of $\ln 2$ ($\approx 5.76 \, \text{J} / \text{mol} \cdot \text{K}$), consistent with the presence of short-range spin correlations. Below 10 K, $C_m$ exhibits a $T^2$-behavior [Fig. 2(a)] indicating the persistence of spin dynamics with low lying gapless excitations, which is in agreement with the finite value of $\chi$ at low $T$ in the context of the QSL state. The $T^2$-dependence of $C_m$ is frequently found in 4d and 5d quantum magnets as a fingerprint of the spin liquid ground state.$^{23,60,61}$

The $^7$Li NMR powder spectra at 70 MHz shown in Fig. 3(a) show a single $^7$Li-NMR line which exhibits a clear broadening towards low temperatures without any strong anisotropy. The spectra consist of superimposed intensities from three

**FIG. 1.** (Color online) (a) The temperature dependence of the ZFC and FC susceptibility $\chi(T)$ measured in an applied field of 0.01 T. (b) $\chi(T)$ at 1 T, with HTSE (high temperature series expansion) and CW (Curie-Weiss) fits as discussed in the text.

**FIG. 2.** (Color online) (a) Magnetic heat capacity co-efficient ($C_m/T$) in various fields as a function of $T/|\theta_{CW}|$. The upper axis shows the absolute $T$-dependence and the solid line represents a $T$-linear fit, as discussed in the text. (b) $T$-dependence of the magnetic entropy in zero field. (c) $T$-dependence of the total heat capacity in zero field for Li$_2$RhO$_3$ compared with the non-magnetic homologue Li$_2$SnO$_3$. The dashed line indicates a $T^2$-behaviour.
remarkable that fluctuating hyperfine field contributions at the nuclei sites. It is 
enning. The broadening is associated with static and slow fluc-
susceptibility demonstrates the magnetic origin of the broad-
consists of a generic feature of Li

gives clear evidence that the low temperature broadening is 
shift is reminiscent of the bulk susceptibility [Fig. 1(b)]. The 

trum [see solid line in Fig. 3(a)]. The 

FIG. 3. (Color online) Representative field-swept \(^7\)Li-NMR spectra 
in Li\(_2\)RhO\(_3\) at different temperatures (the solid line is a simulation 
for 100 K and for 50 K). At the bottom of the figure we show the \(^7\)Li-
NMR spectrum at 130 K for the non-magnetic structural homologue 
Li\(_2\)SnO\(_3\).

that at these fields the system is not yet in the fully polarized 
state and sizeable correlations among Rh\(^{4+}\) moments are 
still present. This is consistent with the absence of LRO in 
C\(_m\) down to 0.35 K. The saturation of \(\delta H(T)\) at low T 
dicates the persistence of a quasi-static distribution of local 
magnetic fields and a slowing down of magnetic fluctuations 
such that Rh\(^{4+}\)-moments fluctuate with a frequency less than 
the NMR frequency. The fact that above approximately 100 K 
[see Fig. 4(a) and Supplementary Material\(^{39}\)] Li\(_2\)RhO\(_3\) and 
Li\(_2\)SnO\(_3\) have comparable NMR linewidths, suggests that the 
effect of anti site order (Li–Rh or Li–Sn) discussed frequen-
ty in the literature\(^{39–45}\) in the linewidth could be neglected (see discussion in \(^{39}\)). The magnetic moment of 0.8 \(\mu_B\) estimated from 
the NMR linewidth at about 4 K and in a NMR field of 4.23 T 
(70 MHz) is small compared to the Rh\(^{4+}\) Curie-Weiss moment 
and suggests the presence of strong quantum fluctuations 
influenced by magnetic frustration\(^{43,44}\). We found no loss of NMR 
signal intensity, typical for some disordered materials, which 
indicates that Li\(_2\)RhO\(_3\) is not a conventional spin glass 
material. This scenario is further supported by the absence of 
rectangular shaped powder averaged NMR spectra expected 
for materials that show LRO\(^{45}\) and moreover by the field in-
dependence of the linewidth. The quasi-static NMR 
results presented so far support the scenario of a minority part 
of moments in a short range like frozen state coexisting with 
a majority of moments which remain liquid-like and which 
fluuctuate at low-\(T\)^\(^{44,45}\).

NMR spin-lattice relaxation rate measurements are very 
suitable to probe slow spin excitations because in general 
\(1/T_1\) tracks the \(q\)-dependent complex dynamic spin suscep-
tibility (see\(^{22}\) for more details). Fig. 5(a) shows \(1/T_1\) vs. \(T\)
at two different NMR frequencies (fields). Towards low temperatures $1/T_1$ decreases linearly with $T$ and passes through a broad maximum around 10 K. This maximum could not be associated with a conventional SG freezing where a critical slowing down of spin fluctuations at $T_g$ leads to a very short $T_1$ and an NMR signal wipeout at low and intermediate $T$. As shown in Fig. 5(a), $1/T_1$ decreases on further cooling below 10 K and displays a pronounced $T^{1.2}$ behavior down to 1.8 K. In principle, $1/T_1$ tracks the spectral density of the Fourier transform of the time correlation function of the transverse component $\delta h_\perp$ of the fluctuating local field at nuclear sites $h_\perp(0)$ with the nuclear Larmor frequency $\omega_N = \gamma H \text{ as } \omega_\perp = \frac{\omega_N}{2}$. $\gamma$ is the gyromagnetic ratio of the nuclear spin. Assuming the time correlation function varies as $e^{-\Lambda t}$, one can express $R = \frac{1}{1/T_1} = \Lambda = \frac{1}{\omega_\perp + \omega_\perp}$, where $\Lambda$ depends on the hyperfine coupling constant and $K$ is the isotropic NMR shift. Here, $\omega_\perp$ corresponds to the fluctuation frequency of the fluctuating hyperfine field at the $^7$Li nucleus site transferred from the fluctuating $\text{Rh}^{4+}$ moments. One would expect $R \approx 1/\omega_0$ when $\omega_\perp \gg \omega_\perp$, while for $\omega_\perp \ll \omega_\perp$ one should find that $R$ depends on the NMR field ($R \approx 1/\omega_0$). When $\omega_\perp = \omega_\perp, R(T)$ approaches a maximum (see Supplemental Materials Fig. S2), which is a consequence of the slowing down of the fluctuation frequency $\omega_\perp$ of $\text{Rh}^{4+}$ moments. We find that $\omega_\perp$ is nearly $T$-independent at high-$T$, but decreases below 10 K as $\omega_\perp \sim T^{1.2}$ at low-$T$, suggesting the slow spin dynamics of $\text{Rh}^{4+}$. This is consistent with the broad NMR line at low-$T$. The slow down of spin fluctuations might then dominate the low-temperature magnetic properties. The power law dependence of $1/T_1$ can be compared with that found in the SOC-driven 5d-spin liquid compound Na$_4$IrO$_6$ and other low dimensional quantum magnets, which is attributed to the existence of a gapless state in the spin exciton spectrum and is in accord with finite value of $\chi$ and $K$, and $C_m \sim T^2$ behavior at low-$T$. The longitudinal nuclear spin-lattice relaxation rate is given by the low energy ($\omega$) and momentum space ($q$) integrated hyperfine form factor $A(q, \omega)$ and the imaginary part of the complex dynamic electron susceptibility $\chi''(q, \omega)$ (proportional to $S(q, \omega)$, the dynamic structure factor). For a 2D Kitaev spin liquid calculations of $S(q, \omega)$ suggest either a gapped ($1/T_1 \sim \exp(-\Delta/k_B T)$) or a gapless ($1/T_1 \sim T^2$) behavior. For Li$_2$RhO$_3$, the gapless $T^{2.2}$ power law or alternatively the (pseudo) gapped behavior (i.e., $1/T_1 \sim \exp(-\Delta/k_B T) + \text{constant}$) reasonably fit the $1/T_1$ data (see Supplemental Materials Fig. S4).

Our muon-spin rotation ($\mu$SR) experiments were carried out at PSI. Representative spectra are shown in Fig. 4(a). For temperatures below about 6 K, there is a single heavily damped oscillatory signal (proportional to $\cos(2\pi v_\mu t)e^{-\Lambda t}$) together with a slow relaxation (proportional to $e^{-\Lambda t}$). The damped oscillation signifies static magnetic $\text{Rh}^{4+}$ moments but the large damping is entirely consistent with moment freezing, and is not associated with long range magnetic ordering. Fluctuations persist at low temperature evidenced by the presence of the slow relaxation. The frequency of the damped oscillation, $v_\mu$, is around 2 MHz and falls slightly

![FIG. 5. (Color online) (a) The $T$-dependence of $1/T_1$ at two NMR frequencies (fields). The solid line indicates a $T^{2.2}$-behavior below 10 K whereas the dashed line depicts the $T$-linear behavior around 100 K. (b) Longitudinal magnetization recovery curves $M(t)$ at various temperatures in a semi-log plot. The solid curved lines are the individual fits of the data with a stretched exponential function (see Supplemental Materials for more details) at various temperatures.](image1)

![FIG. 6. (Color online) (a) Representative $\mu$SR spectra for Li$_2$RhO$_3$ measured at a range of temperatures. (b) The fitted precession frequency $v_\mu$ which indicates the average field experienced by the muon in the spin frozen state (solid black circles, left-hand axis) and the relaxation rate $\Lambda$ of the slowly-relaxing component (open red squares, right-hand axis). (c) The amplitude $A_f$ of the fast-relaxing component (solid black circles, left-hand axis) and $\Lambda$ (open red squares, right-hand axis).](image2)
on warming [see Fig. 4(b)] while the relaxation rate $\lambda$ rises. At $T$ above $\approx 6$ K, it is no longer possible to fit the fast relaxation with a damped oscillation, and we identify this $T$ with the freezing temperature $T_g$, in agreement with magnetization measurements and coinciding with the peak measured in ac susceptibility (see Supplemental Material). For $T > T_g$ we fit our data instead using a sum of two exponential relaxations, so that the fitting function becomes $A(t) = A(0)[A_1 e^{-\lambda t} + (1 - A_1)e^{-\lambda t}]$. The amplitude of the fast relaxing term $A_1$ falls on warming above 6 K [see Fig. 4(c)] and is entirely absent by 15 K by which temperature the relaxation is dominated by a Gaussian response characteristic of static nuclear moments. These observations indicate that although the freezing disappears above $T_g$ there remain some frozen regions of the sample which persist well above $T_g$, up to almost $2T_g$, perhaps in small, slowly-fluctuating clusters. These slow fluctuations may likely contribute to the slow relaxation that is observed in these data. The volume fraction of the clusters decreases on warming and this can be directly related to the decrease in $A_1$. In fact, the observation of a slowly relaxing fraction throughout the temperature range demonstrates that the frozen state possesses some weak dynamics. These measurements are consistent with the development of a moment-frozen state below 6 K at small magnetic fields.

III. CONCLUSION

We have presented a study on the magnetism of Li$_3$RhO$_3$ to probe a possible spin liquid ground state and investigate the presence of partial frozen moments. Whereas frozen moments were evidenced by low field susceptibility measurements, the NMR measurements performed in higher field could hardly resolve this effect. The zero field $\mu$SR evidences frozen moments but also persistent low energy spin dynamics. $\chi$, $\delta H$ and $K$ remain finite towards low $T$ whereas the magnetic specific heat as well as the spin lattice relaxation rate exhibit characteristic temperature dependencies assigned to quantum spin liquids. The magnetic heat capacity $C_m$ displays no signature of LRO down to 0.35 K despite an AFM interaction $J/k_B \approx 75$ K between Rh$^{4+}$ moments. The $C_m \sim T^{-2.2}$ and the $1/T_1 \sim T^{-2.2}$ behavior at low-$T$ might be assigned to gapless excitations as predicted for the Kitaev quantum spin liquid state. Further studies on single crystals are highly recommended to establish whether the partial moment freezing is generic to the system (e.g. because of the proximity of the Kitaev QSL to the magnetic ordered phase) or a matter of sample quality (presence of structural disorder). Nonetheless the study presented here clearly show that Li$_3$RhO$_3$ is not a conventional bulk spin glass material, the SRO effects are wiped out in magnetic fields and most important the low-$T$ spin dynamics as well as the specific heat are reminiscent of that of a quantum spin liquid.

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Supplemental Material: Local Magnetism and Spin Dynamics in the Honeycomb Rhodate Li$_2$RhO$_3$

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I. SAMPLE SYNTHESIS, MAGNETIC EXCHANGE AND EFFECT OF LATTICE SITE DISORDER

We have synthesized Li$_2$RhO$_3$ polycrystals by the solid state reaction method from stoichiometric amounts of Li$_2$CO$_3$ and Rh-powder. The mixture has been pelletized several times and reacted in a flow of O$_2$ at temperatures up to 850°C. Powder x-ray-diffraction (XRD) scans do not reveal any evidence for secondary phases and are similar to those reported in Refs. 1 and 2. There is no evidence for site mixing between Li$_2$RhO$_3$ and two out of the honeycomb planes. The lattice structure hosts three different Li-sites (one with in-plane translational stacking faults along the c-axis are probably present in our sample of Li$_2$RhO$_3$. Nevertheless, this is not likely to affect the in-plane 2D physics. Edge-sharing RhO$_6$ octahedra form a Rh-honeycomb arrangement in which each Rh ion carries a spin-orbit entangled $j_{eff}$ moment. The lattice structure hosts three different Li-sites (one within and two out of the honeycomb plane).

II. DC- AND AC- SUSCEPTIBILITY

The d.c. magnetic susceptibility ($\chi=M/H$) was measured using a SQUID magnetometer (MPMS, Quantum Design, QD) in the temperature range 1.8 $\leq$ T $\leq$ 300 K in small magnetic fields ($\mu_0H \leq 1$ T) where partial spin freezing was found and at 4.23 T and 6.89 T at which NMR measurements were carried out. The frequency and temperature dependence of the a.c. susceptibility data were obtained using a commercial a.c. susceptometer (PPMS, Quantum Design). We found a pronounced peak at $T_\chi$ = 6 K in the a.c. susceptibility indicative of partial spin freezing, accompanied by a weak frequency dependence reminiscent of a spin glass (see Fig. S1). The effective exchange coupling between Rh$^{4+}$ using mean field theory (MFT) can be estimated as: $J/k_B = -30\delta_{\text{CW}}/\zeta(S+1) = 80$ K (with coordination number $z = 3$). This is a very simple and crude estimate given the presence of various exchange couplings in Li$_2$RhO$_3$ of comparable strengths.

For many $S = \frac{1}{2}$ quantum magnets the exchange interaction between the nearest neighbor spins can be described by a Heisenberg type hamiltonian, $H = J\sum_{<i,j>} S_i \cdot S_j$. The magnetic susceptibility at high temperatures can be modelled by the high temperature series expansion (HTSE). For pseudospin $s = \frac{1}{2}$ Rh$^{4+}$ ions with moderate SOC on the honeycomb lattice the model is of some use (especially if the exchange is predominant antiferromagnetic and the Kitaev term is small) and the susceptibility is then given by

$$\chi = \frac{N\alpha^2 k_B^2}{4k_B T} \sum_i \left( \frac{J_{eff}}{k_B T} \right)^n,$$

(1)

where $n = 0.5$ and $\alpha$ are series coefficients, the values of which can be found in Ref. 2. We obtain $J/k_B \approx (75 \pm 5)$ K, which is close to that estimated using MFT. Given the simplicity of the model and appreciable spin orbit interactions with $J_{eff} = \frac{1}{2}$, the obtained coupling constant is a rough estimate. It may be noted that the HTSE is strictly valid only for $S = \frac{1}{2}$ systems in the absence of spin orbit interactions.

III. $^7$Li NMR: LINEWIDTH ANALYSIS AND SPIN-LATTICE RELAXATION

NMR is a useful local probe for spin dynamics and local disorder. The local disorder (due to defects, vacancies or anti site order) usually shows in an enhanced NMR linewidth $\delta H$, whereas the dynamical information arises via the spin lattice relaxation rate which reflects the fluctuation of hyperfine fields. The NMR spectra and spin-lattice relaxation measurements at two frequencies were carried out using a standard pulsed NMR spectrometer.

The $T$-dependence of $\delta H$ in Li$_2$RhO$_3$ was compared with that measured in the non-magnetic reference Li$_2$SnO$_3$. This
allows the investigation of the effect of the quadrupolar broadening on the spectra. The linewidth of Li$_2$RhO$_3$ ($\delta H = \delta H_{Qd} + \delta H_{Qq}$) has a $T$-dependent contribution ($\delta H_{Qd}$) related to the underlying Rh magnetism, plus a (nearly) $T$-independent contribution ($\delta H_{Qq}$) arising from the (powder averaged) quadrupolar transitions of the $I = \frac{3}{2}$ quadrupolar Li nuclei. For Li$_2$SnO$_3$ the linewidth originates only from the quadrupole effect ($\delta H_{Qd} = 0$). As seen in Fig. 3, the magnetic broadening in Li$_2$RhO$_3$ becomes dominant below approximately 50 K (where $\delta H_{Qq}$ saturates) whereas towards higher temperatures the linewidth mainly originates from the $T$-dependence of the quadrupole contribution.

To illustrate this we have shown the $^7$Li-NMR lines at 200 K for both compound together in Fig. S2. In addition a model calculation for the quadrupolar-split NMR line is shown. Both lines are of equal width, but one should note that there are three different Li positions in the structure (one within and two out of the honeycomb planes) which also (beside the powder average) lead to some averaging of the total spectra. Having this in mind it is quite surprising that both lines are relatively narrow and exhibit nearly no spectral anisotropy. The equal linewidth at high temperatures also gives evidence for the absence of anti-site order (Li-Rh and Li-Sn site mixing) frequently discussed in the literature.

The spin lattice relaxation times were measured following the saturation recovery method using short rf pulses. In Li$_2$RhO$_3$, the recovery of longitudinal nuclear magnetization, $M(t)$, at time $t$ after the saturation pulse could be fitted with $1 - M(t)/M(\infty) = e^{-t/(T_1T)^\beta}$ (here $M(\infty)$ is the saturation magnetization, and $\beta$ ($\approx 0.5$) is the stretch exponent, which is found to be independent of temperature here). This function arises when there is a distribution of relaxation times. The spin-lattice relaxation rate, $1/T_1$ at each temperature is determined by fitting the nuclear magnetization $M(t)$ using the stretched exponential function (see Fig. S5(b)). A non-exponential autocorrelation function is frequently found in quantum spin liquids, but is also common in disordered materials. In general, $1/T_1$ probes the $q$-averaged low energy spin excitations and $1/(T_1T)$ can be expressed as the wave-vector $q$-summation of the imaginary part of the dynamic electron spin susceptibility $\chi''(q,\omega_0)$: $\frac{1}{T_1T} \propto \sum_q |A_{hf}(q)|^2 \frac{\chi''(q,\omega_0)}{\omega_0}$. Here, $A_{hf}(q)$ is the form factor of the hyperfine interactions and $\omega_0$ the nuclear Larmor frequency. Fig. S3 shows the temperature dependence of $R(T) = 1/(T_1T)$ as a sort of "on site" fluctuation rate. Above 100 K, $R(T)$ is constant which indicates local moment magnetism, consistent with the Curie-Weiss behaviour of the susceptibility. However, towards low temperatures strong correlations between Rh moments set in which is reflected by an increase of $R(T)$. Around 10 K these correlations start dying out towards low temperatures which indicates a slowing down of spin fluctuations. One way to
discuss whether the ground state is spin gapped or gapless is the Arrhenius type of plot (see Fig. S4). Here the experimental data points from Fig. 5 in the main text are replotted together with the $T^{-2}$ power law and the simple equation for excitations across a gap (without $1/T_1 \sim \exp(-\Delta/k_B T)$, shown by the straight line in Fig. S4) and with a residual (constant) value. A residual $1/T_1$ value might originate from a weak additional Heisenberg type of exchange coupling. Furthermore, a sizable gap anisotropy might also lead to a residual value of $T_1$. Within the experimental accuracy, we cannot distinguish between a $T^{-2}$ power law and a pseudogapped behaviour (including a residual value of the relaxation rate) in the spin-lattice relaxation rate. Therefore, our conclusion is that our NMR measurements are probing gapless excitations, consistent with the specific heat results.

IV. MUON-SPIN ROTATION

The muon-spin rotation ($\mu$SR) measurements on the polycrystalline sample of Li$_2$RhO$_3$ shown in Fig. 6 of the main paper were carried out on the general-purpose spectrometer (GPS) at the Swiss Muon Source ($\mu$S) at PSI (Switzerland). The $\mu$SR data were analyzed using the analysis software WIMDA. In a $\mu$SR experiment spin-polarized muons are implanted into a sample, where they Larmor precess around the local magnetic field at the muon stopping site. By measuring the angular distribution of the decay product positrons the spin polarization can be tracked. In the case of long-range magnetic order, coherent magnetic fields at particular muon stopping sites within the unit cell lead to oscillatory signals with frequencies dependent on the local magnetic fields at each site. In $\mu$SR, impurity phases only contribute according to their volume fraction, and so the technique is an effective measure of intrinsic behavior.

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