Macroscopic rotation of photon polarization induced by a single spin

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Entangling a single spin to the polarization of a single incoming photon, generated by an external source, would open new paradigms in quantum optics such as delayed-photon entanglement, deterministic logic gates or fault-tolerant quantum computing. These perspectives rely on the possibility that a single spin induces a macroscopic rotation of a photon polarization. Such polarization rotations induced by single spins were recently observed, yet limited to a few $10^{-3}$ degrees due to poor spin-photon coupling. Here we report the enhancement by three orders of magnitude of the spin-photon interaction, using a cavity quantum electrodynamics device. A single hole spin in a semiconductor quantum dot is deterministically coupled to a micropillar cavity. The cavity-enhanced coupling between the incoming photons and the solid-state spin results in a polarization rotation by $\pm 6^\circ$ when the spin is optically initialized in the up or down state. These results open the way towards a spin-based quantum network.
Solid-state spins hold many promises for quantum information processing\(^1^2\), and in the last decade a strong effort has been devoted to develop optical quantum operations with single spins in semiconductor quantum dots (QDs)\(^3^\). Recently, spin–phonon entanglement has also been demonstrated between a photon emitted by a quantum emitter and the spin degree of freedom of the same emitter\(^6^8\).

Another venue to spin–photon interfacing is to make use of the rotation of optical polarization (so-called Faraday or Kerr rotation) induced by a single spin placed at the centre of a cavity–quantum electrodynamics (QED) device. This approach allows interfacing a resident spin with a photon generated by an external source, opening new possibilities in quantum optics. A number of proposals have thus emerged\(^9^\), which exploit large Faraday/Kerr rotations for various applications such as delayed photon–photon entanglement\(^9\), deterministic logic gates\(^10^\) or fault-tolerant quantum computing\(^11\). However, although Faraday or Kerr polarization rotation in a magnetized medium is routinely used for magnetic material characterization\(^19\), observations of Kerr rotation induced by a single spin we reported only recently\(^20^22\), with rotation angles in the few \(10^{-3}\) degree range.

In this work, we technologically implement a cavity-QED device coupled to a stationary spin qubit, allowing the enhancement by three orders of magnitude of the polarization rotation. A resident hole spin, in a semiconductor QD-pillar cavity device, is initialized\(^23\) and measured using resonant pump and probe beams: a Kerr rotation of several degrees is obtained. We finally show how quantum measurements and quantum entanglement can be implemented with realistic cavity-QED devices.

Results

Device characterization. In the following, we study a single hole spin in a QD efficiently coupled to the mode of a micropillar cavity (Fig. 1a). Spectral and spatial matching between the QD transition and the pillar cavity mode are deterministically obtained using the in-situ lithography technique\(^24\) (see Methods). The fabricated device presents an optimal QD-cavity coupling strength, nearly polarization-degenerate optical modes and an efficient coupling with external beams\(^25^26\).

The quantities describing this device (see Supplementary Note 1), sketched in Fig. 1b, are the QD-cavity coupling strength \(g\), the QD field dephasing rate \(\gamma\) and the total cavity energy damping rate \(\kappa = \kappa_1 + \kappa_2 + \kappa_0\) (with \(\kappa_1, \kappa_2\) and \(\kappa_0\) the top mirror, bottom mirror and side-wall leakage rates, respectively). These parameters are combined into two figures of merit, the top mirror output coupling efficiency \(\gamma_1/\kappa\) and the device cooperativity \(C = g^2/\gamma\).

Preliminary device characterization is performed using coherent reflection spectroscopy\(^27^31\) (see Methods), using a continuous-wave (CW) laser with a finely tuneable angular frequency \(\omega\) (1 MHz linewidth). The device reflectivity is displayed in Fig. 1c,d for two orthogonal polarizations (noted X and Y). For both polarizations, the reflectivity spectrum displays a Lorentzian cavity dip with \(\kappa = 630 \mu\text{eV}\) full-width at half-maximum, corresponding to a quality factor \(Q = 2,140\). A small splitting between the two reflectivity dips is observed when comparing Fig. 1c,d. This is a signature of a residual pillar ellipticity, and the X and Y linear polarization directions correspond to the pillar minor and major axis. The mode splitting (90 \(\mu\text{eV}\)) is much smaller than \(\kappa\); thus, the modes are close to polarization degeneracy. The top- and bottom-mirror output-coupling efficiencies are estimated to be \(\kappa_1/\kappa = \kappa_2/\kappa \approx 0.4\) (see Supplementary Note 2) corresponding to a low side-wall leakage contribution \(\kappa_0/\kappa \approx 0.2\). This constitutes a substantial improvement compared with the device recently used to demonstrate a nonlinear optical response to few-photon pulses\(^25\), where \((\kappa_1 + \kappa_2)/\kappa\) was \(\sim 0.16\). Finally, Fig. 1e displays a zoom centred on the X-polarized cavity dip, showing a narrow peak evidencing the efficient interaction with the QD transition: the resonantly excited dipole generates an optical field that interferes coherently with the exciting field. Furthermore, this transition corresponds to a QD which is charged with a resident hole (see Methods).

Optical nonlinearity and hole spin initialization. Figure 2a presents several spectra, centred on the QD transition, measured with linearly (X) polarized excitation and for different incident powers \(P_0\). The QD resonance progressively disappears when the intracavity photon number increases in the cavity: this is the optical nonlinearity effect resulting from the saturation of the QD transition, as recently shown in ref. 25. Figure 2b displays similar spectra measured under left-handed (L) circularly polarized excitation, instead of a linearly (X) polarized excitation: a similar trend is observed, that is, a gradual disappearance of the QD peak with increasing power, yet for much lower powers. The QD-induced reflectivity variation, denoted \(\Delta R_{\text{QD}}\), is defined as the absolute peak reflectivity subtracted by its value away from the QD resonance peak (see illustration in Fig. 1e): it is plotted in Fig. 2c as a function of the incident power \(P_0\). It shows that the threshold for the peak disappearance is two orders of magnitude lower for the circular polarization: as discussed below, this lower threshold is a signature that optical initialization of a resident-hole spin is occurring, as reported in ref. 23.
under circular and linear polarization. These results show that despite a finite polarization splitting of the cavity mode, optical initialization in a given spin state is achieved. We note that some small deviation from theory is observed in Fig. 2b when the pump is set to circular polarization. This deviation might be a signature of a nuclear polarization induced by the circularly polarized pumping, an effect that is not taken into account in our model.

**Kerr rotation measurements.** In the following, we measure the Kerr rotation induced by the spin pumped either in the $|\uparrow\rangle$ or $|\downarrow\rangle$ state. To do so, a weak and coherent CW probe beam ($P_{\text{probe}} = 110 \text{nW}$, corresponding to $n \approx 3 \times 10^{-4}$ intracavity photons) is sent on the device. Its polarization is prepared in the linear state $(|L\rangle + |R\rangle)/\sqrt{2}$, where $|L\rangle$ and $|R\rangle$ are the photon states associated to the left-handed and right-handed circular polarizations, respectively. The reflected beam polarization is then in the normalized state $(r_L|L\rangle + r_R|R\rangle)/\sqrt{|r_L|^2 + |r_R|^2}$, with $r_L$ and $r_R$ being the complex reflection coefficients for L-polarized and R-polarized light (see Fig. 3a). When the hole is in state $|\downarrow\rangle$, the left-handed component of the probe beam is insensitive to the QD transition, whereas the right-handed component experiences a reflectivity shift induced by the QD transition: thus, $r_L$ depends on the detuning between the QD transition energy $\omega_{\text{QD}}$ and the probe photon energy $\omega_{\text{probe}}$ according to the relation $r_L \propto \omega_{\text{QD}} - \omega_{\text{probe}}$. A symmetrical behaviour is expected when the hole is in state $|\uparrow\rangle$. This results in a Kerr rotation of the probe beam polarization depending on the spin state. We note the corresponding output polarization states $|\Psi_\uparrow\rangle$ and $|\Psi_\downarrow\rangle$, for the spin states $|\uparrow\rangle$ and $|\downarrow\rangle$ (see Supplementary Note 3).

The Kerr-rotation experimental setup is sketched in Fig. 3b. Two co-linear CW pump and probe beams, with photon angular frequencies $\omega_{\text{pump}}$ and $\omega_{\text{probe}}$, are focused on the upper surface of the microcavity. The pump beam polarization is chosen to be left-handed or right-handed, to initialize the spin in either the $|\uparrow\rangle$ or $|\downarrow\rangle$ state. The probe beam is linearly (X) polarized and modulated at 100 kHz. The reflected beams are sent onto a polarization beam-splitter that separates the total reflected power into its horizontal and vertical components $P_H$ and $P_V$. These two components are measured with two avalanche photodiodes, and a lock-in amplifier filters the signal contribution arising from the probe. The Kerr rotation angle is then deduced from the measured photodiode contrast, $(P_V - P_H)/(P_V + P_H)$. In the absence of polarization rotation, a zero contrast is observed. On the contrary, a positive (resp. negative) contrast will be observed in the case of a clockwise (resp. counter-clockwise) polarization rotation.

Figure 3c presents the Kerr rotation angle measured for both L-polarized and R-polarized pump beams, for a pump beam in resonance with the QD transition. A dispersive shape centred on $\omega_{\text{QD}}$ is observed for the Kerr rotation signal as a function of $\omega_{\text{probe}}$, as previously reported in ref. 20. However, here the Kerr rotation is macroscopic, with a maximum rotation angle of $\pm 6^\circ$. This enhancement by three orders of magnitude is not simply explained by the multiple back-and-forth trips of the photons in the cavity, but results from an enhanced light–matter interaction in a cavity-QED regime. It requires a stringent control of the system: non-polarized cavity modes, precise positioning of the QD inside the cavity, low optical losses and low QD dephasing, together with a good optical coupling between the cavity mode and the incident laser beam. Quantitatively, two main features account for this huge enhancement. The first one is the increase of the spin–photon interaction induced by the optical confinement. This increase is governed by the device cooperativity $C = g^2/\kappa \gamma \approx 0.2$, which describes how efficiently a single two-level
Discussion

Our results show for the very first time that a macroscopic rotation induced by a single spin can experimentally be obtained: this is crucial to enable measuring a spin in a single-shot, non-destructive way, thanks to a very short measurement time. We now show that this enhancement can be pushed to the point where a single reflected photon, when detected by a photon counter, is sufficient to perform an ideal quantum non-demolition measurement.

An important figure of merit for quantum applications is the scalar product $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle$ between the two possible output polarization states, $|\Psi'_o\rangle$ and $|\Psi'_o\rangle$, associated to the spin states $|\uparrow\rangle$ and $|\downarrow\rangle$. This scalar product governs the level of measurement quantum back-action induced by the detection of a single-photon on the single spin state, that is, how strongly a single-photon detection event can project the spin in either the $|\uparrow\rangle$ or $|\downarrow\rangle$ state. The ideal case $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle = 0$ allows a maximal quantum back-action to be obtained, with a single-photon detection event leading to complete spin projection. Indeed, as sketched in Fig. 4a, if $|\Psi'_o\rangle$ and $|\Psi'_o\rangle$ are orthogonal they can be mapped into horizontal ($|H\rangle$) and vertical ($|V\rangle$) polarization states, which can then be unambiguously distinguished using single-photon detectors. In such an experiment, a single click on one single-photon counter will project the spin in state $|\uparrow\rangle$, while a single click on the other counter will project the spin in state $|\downarrow\rangle$; this would constitute a projective quantum measurement performed with a single detected photon.

We also point out that the spin state can be initialized in a well-defined coherent superposition of $|\uparrow\rangle$ and $|\downarrow\rangle$, using microwave pulses or optical pulses with a temporal profile adapted to the cavity lifetime. A maximally entangled state $(|\uparrow\rangle + |\downarrow\rangle)/\sqrt{2}$ could then be produced between the spin and the reflected photon. As with the recent demonstrations of spin–photon entanglement, these quantum operations would be conditioned on the actual detection of the entangled photon. Here the success probability of the entangling gate would be limited by the probability for the incident photon to be reflected, in other words, by the mode reflectivity $R_m$. As discussed below, state orthogonality $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle = 0$ can be achieved with realistic devices together with large values of the success probability.

For each device, there is a minimal value of $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle$, which can be achieved through a proper choice of the QD-cavity detuning and probe photon energy. Figure 4b displays the calculated minimal value of $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle$ as a function of the cooperativity $C$ and top-mirror output-coupling $\kappa_t/\kappa$; the current device with $\kappa_t/\kappa \approx 0.4$ and $C \approx 0.2$ is indicated by the white circle. What Fig. 4b shows is that the ideal situation $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle = 0$ can be reached for a large range of realistic values of $C$ and $\kappa_t/\kappa$. A single-sided cavity with $\gamma_s = 0$ (highly reflective bottom mirror), but with the present device values for $\kappa_t$, $\kappa_s$, $g$, and $\gamma$, would correspond to $\kappa_t/\kappa \approx 0.66$ and $C \approx 0.3$; this would be enough for achieving $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle = 0$, and thus maximal-fidelity quantum measurement and quantum entanglement operations using the reflected photons.

Finally, as shown in Fig. 4c, the ideal situation $\langle |\Psi'_o| |\Psi'_o \rangle = 0$ can be achieved together with a significantly high value of the Kerr rotation induced by a single spin in a cavity-QED device. (a) Polarization states for the incident and reflected beam. The reflected beam results from the interference of two contributions: direct reflection and light injected into and re-extracted from the cavity. (b) Simplified scheme of the experimental setup used for spin optical pumping and Kerr rotation measurements on a QD-polar cavity device. The polarization states are indicated: the probe beam (blue arrows) is linearly polarized, whereas the pump beam (black arrows) is either left-handed (L-pump) or right-handed (R-pump) circularly polarized. EOM, electro-optical modulator allowing the lock-in detection setup to filter out the contribution from the unmodulated pump beam. PBS, polarizing beam splitter, separating the horizontal (H) and vertical (V) components of the beam polarization, allowing the measurement of the Kerr rotation angle. (c) Kerr rotation angle as a function of $\delta_{\text{pump}}$ with $\delta_{\text{pump}}$ fixed at 1.34585 eV. Symbols: experimental data (L-pump in red, R-pump in green); macroscopic Kerr rotation angles up to + 6° or –6° are obtained, depending on the pump polarization handedness. Solid line: theoretical fit with partial spin initialization. Dashed line: theoretical prediction with perfect spin initialization. (d) Kerr rotation angle as a function of $\delta_{\text{pump}}$ with $\delta_{\text{pump}}$ fixed at a maximum of Kerr rotation (thick vertical arrow in c).
Cavity-QED device (C ≥ 1 and \( k_1/k_2 = 1 \)). In the framework of a future solid-state quantum network, performing novel spin–photon operations was previously envisioned in purely theoretical proposals\(^9\)–\(^{18}\). It now becomes possible with the current technological state of the art.

Methods

Device fabrication. A Ga\(_{0.75}\)Al\(_{0.25}\)As/Ga\(_{0.73}\)As microcavity embedding self-assembled InAs QDs is grown by molecular beam epitaxy on a GaAs substrate. The bottom and top Bragg mirrors have 24 and 20 pairs, respectively, and present equal reflectivities (that is, \( k_1 = k_2 \)). The in-situ lithography technique is implemented to define pillars centred on single QDs. A red laser beam is first used to excite and monitor the QD emission, so as to measure its spatial position with 50-nm accuracy. A green laser beam is then used to expose, at the QD position, a layer of photoresist, which is subsequently used as a mask for inductively coupled plasma etching of the micropillar. The device selected in this work is charged with a resident hole and has a diameter of 2.1 \( \mu \)m.

Resonant excitation experiments. The sample is maintained at 20 K inside a helium-vapour cryostat, together with an aspheric lens and cryogenic nanomicroscopes. The reflectivity is deduced from the reflected and incident powers measured with avalanche photodiodes and then normalized to unity when the laser photon energy is far from the cavity mode resonance. No magnetic field has been applied. Spin initialization and Kerr rotation measurements were performed using liquid-crystal variable waveplates, to compensate the polarization distortions induced by the various components along the optical paths.

Identification of the carrier type. Although a single QD line is observed under resonant excitation measurements (as in Fig. 1e), four emission lines are observed in photoluminescence measurements with non-resonant excitation: neutral exciton, biexciton, negatively- and positively-charged trions. The exciton and biexciton lines are first identified by photon correlation measurements showing the characteristic bunching of the radiative cascade. Then, a definite proof that the line studied in Fig. 1e corresponds to the positively charged trion transition, and not the negatively charged one, is provided by the spin initialization experiment. Indeed, a hole spin can be initialized without any applied magnetic field, an effect that is not observed with an electron spin because of the strong electron–nuclear interaction, leading to short electron spin lifetimes \( T_{1(electronic)} < T_{1(hole)} \)\(^23\).

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge A. Dousse and J. Suffczynski for the pillar sample and E.L. Ivchenko and D. Lanzillotti Kimura for valuable discussions. This work was partially supported by the French ANR MIND, ANR QDOM, the ERC starting grant 277885 QD-CQED, the CHISTERA project SSQN, the French Labex NANOSACLAY and the RENATECH network. M.G. is grateful to RFBR, RF President grant NSh-1085.2014.2 and RF Government Grant 14.Z50.31.0021 for financial support.

Author contributions

C.A. and J.D. performed the experiments and analysed the experimental data. L.L. developed the theory of spin initialization and Kerr rotation in a cavity-QED device, with the help of M.G. V.L. participated in the experimental developments. A.L., I.S. and P.S. fabricated the sample. L.L. and P.S. conducted the project. All authors participated in scientific discussions and manuscript preparation.

Additional information

Supplementary Information accompanies this paper at http://www.nature.com/naturecommunications.

How to cite this article: Arnold, C. et al. Macroscopic rotation of photon polarization induced by a single spin. Nat. Commun. 6:6236 doi: 10.1038/ncomms7236 (2015).

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