Neutron Scattering Study of URu$_{2-x}$Re$_x$Si$_2$ with $x = 0.10$: Driving Order towards Quantum Criticality

T. J. Williams, Z. Yamani, N.P. Butch, G.M. Luke, M.B. Maple, and W.J.L. Buyers

1Department of Physics and Astronomy, McMaster University, 1280 Main St. W., Hamilton, ON, Canada, L8S 4M1
2National Research Council, Canadian Neutron Beam Centre, Chalk River Laboratories, Chalk River, ON, Canada, K0J 1J0
3Department of Physics, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA, 92093
4Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, MSG 1Z8

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We report inelastic neutron scattering measurements in the hidden order state of URu$_{2-x}$Re$_x$Si$_2$ with $x = 0.10$. We observe that towards the ferromagnetic quantum critical point induced by the negative chemical pressure of Re-doping, the gapped incommensurate fluctuations are robust and comparable in intensity to the parent material. As the Re doping moves the system toward the quantum critical point, the commensurate spin fluctuations related to hidden order weaken, display a shortened lifetime and slow down. Halfway to the quantum critical point, the hidden order phase survives, albeit weakened, in contrast to its destruction by hydrostatic pressure and by positive chemical pressure from Rh-doping.

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In the field of strongly correlated heavy fermion systems, one of the most puzzling long-standing issues is the nature of the hidden order below the large specific heat jump at $T_0 = 17$ K in URu$_2$Si$_2$ [1,3]. A superconducting phase also follows below $1.2$ K. Despite much research over the past 25 years [5–9] the order parameter remains unknown. The small antiferromagnetic moment of 0.03 $\mu_B$ that develops below 17 K cannot explain the large specific heat jump at this second-order phase transition. Antiferromagnetism therefore cannot be the main cause of the hidden order. The system appears to have condensed into a new phase of matter for which the order parameter and associated symmetries differ from conventional expectations. In previous work, we eliminated crystal fields and orbital currents as a source of hidden order [10–12]. The spins fluctuating above the 17 K transition are centred on the incommensurate wavevector $(1 \pm \delta, 0, 0)$ with $\delta = 0.4$. Emerging from that wavevector is a high-velocity cone of strongly damped gapless excitations that extend over a finite region of the Brillouin zone. They provide evidence of itinerant, rather than localized spins. In the precursor phase to hidden order, Wiebe et al. calculated that these gapless spin fluctuations give rise to a term in the specific heat that closely accounts for the magnitude of the giant specific heat linear in $T$ that was previously attributed entirely to electrons [11]. In addition, the decrease of the specific heat below $T_0$ is now understood [11] to arise from the formation of a spin gap below $T_0$. More recently, the excitations have been interpreted as the response of itinerant spins to Fermi surface nesting, similar to that of chromium, and specific nesting vectors were proposed [12]. Evidence of Kondo hybridization arises from STM studies [13]. Despite this considerable progress, the symmetry of the order parameter that condenses in the hidden order phase remains unknown.

Another route to discovering the hidden order symmetry is to move away from the object of interest by applying hydrostatic pressure, or chemical pressure by doping. Hydrostatic pressure has been recently found to cause commensurate condensation of a larger antiferromagnetic moment of 0.3 $\mu_B$ and the collapse of the strong commensurate spin excitations [14–15]. The hidden order phase is eventually lost with application of pressure beyond about 1.5 GPa. On the contrary, the hidden order phase can be retained by applying negative chemical pressure. This is done by expanding the lattice constants by alloying with rhenium as discovered in the pioneering work of Dalichaouch et al. [16–17]. However, the Re replacement of Ru atoms in URu$_{2-x}$Re$_x$Si$_2$ reduces the hidden order transition from 17 K to 13 K for $x = 0.10$ [18–20]. It also reduces the superconducting transition from 1.5 K to 0.23 K at $x = 0.01$. Interestingly, this represents a first step on the way to reaching a quantum critical point where the hidden order gives over to ferromagnetism [18]. The system exhibits non-Fermi liquid behavior for 0.15 $< x < 0.6$. The magnetic phase diagram is shown in Fig. 1.

We performed neutron scattering measurements on the DUALSPEC spectrometer at the C5 beamline of the NRU reactor at Chalk River Laboratories. Single crystals of URu$_{1.9}$Re$_{0.1}$Si$_2$ and URu$_2$Si$_2$ were aligned in the (H 0 L) scattering plane. Unless otherwise stated, the experiments were performed with a setup and collimation of 0.53º-PG-0.55º-S-0.85º-PG-1.2º with a final scattering energy $E_f = 14.6$ meV, using two pyrolytic graphite (PG) filters, a vertically focusing PG monochromator and a flat
FIG. 1: Magnetic phase diagram of URu$_{2-x}$Re$_x$Si$_2$ showing the antiferromagnetic (hidden order) and ferromagnetic phases. From Ref. [18], also see [19] [20].

PG analyzer. The fast neutron contribution to the background was measured by rotating the analyzer from the Bragg reflection by five degrees.

We find that there is no elastic incommensurate scattering at 2 K at the wavevector (1.4 0 0) nor at the commensurate antiferromagnetic point (1 0 0). The latter is in contrast to the parent material, where the weak elastic scattering at the commensurate point is believed to arise from a minority phase [10].

Fig. 2 shows the dependence of scattering along the (H 0 0) direction at an energy transfer of 2.9 meV at 2 K and 40 K. This measurement represents the raw data. At 2 K, the scattering shows the relative strength expected from the magnetic form factor at equivalent incommensurate wavevectors (0.6 0 0) and (1.4 0 0). At this temperature, the scattering at the commensurate position (1 0 0) also exhibits comparable strength. The fast neutron background is shown, as well as the total sample background, obtained from the fitting, described later in the text.

The change in scattering as a function of temperature, both at the commensurate and incommensurate positions, can be used to identify the hidden order transition. At 40 K, well above the hidden order transition, Fig. 2 shows that the incommensurate scattering remains strong, with roughly half the intensity, but the commensurate fluctuations decrease substantially. This is consistent with the suggestion that commensurate (1 0 0) dynamic spin excitations are a signature of the hidden order phase [21], whereas the incommensurate scattering is present in both the paramagnetic and hidden order phases. Figure 3 shows the temperature dependence of the commensurate (1 0 0) fluctuations at 1.65 meV. This measurement was performed under different experimental conditions, which accounts for the change in the background compared to Fig. 2 but with the same array of single crystals. A discontinuity in the temperature dependence of the peak is observed around ~13 K, which may indicate the onset of the hidden order phase. This change is not as clear as that observed in the parent material [21], likely due to electronic disorder associated with the Re substitution. However, the reduction in this dynamic measure of T$_0$ is consistent with references [16] [18].

Energy scans at Q = (1.4 0 0), comparing the 10% Re-doped with the pure crystal are shown in Fig. 4. The data have been normalized to constant volume for the two crystals via phonon measurements at (2.3 0 0) and (1.8 0 0) respectively. The spectrum of URu$_{1.5}$Re$_{0.1}$Si$_2$ also
exhibits an incommensurate spin gap similar to that in pure URu$_2$Si$_2$ [12, 22]. However the gap value is lowered by doping.

The normalized intensity comparison of Fig. 4 shows doping has reduced the intensity at the incommensurate wavevector by a factor of 2 (obtained from the integrated intensity of the peaks). Re-doping also increases the spectral width as seen in Fig. 4, showing that the fluctuations are highly damped by doping. The slowing of fluctuations is more dramatic at the commensurate hidden order wavevector, as shown in Fig. 5. There, the lifetime of perfect nesting by charge impurities.

Attempts to fit the commensurate fluctuations at (1 0 0) to the Balatsky theoretical model did not converge. The data for the commensurate and incommensurate excitations for both doped and pure compounds were therefore fitted to Lorentzians for comparison purposes, given by:

$$I(\vec{Q}^*, \omega) = \frac{A}{\omega_0^*} \left[ \frac{1}{(\omega - \omega_0^*)^2 + \gamma^2} - \frac{1}{(\omega + \omega_0^*)^2 + \gamma^2} \right] \tag{2}$$

This was multiplied by a Bose factor, and convoluted with the resolution function, as described above. The incommensurate fluctuations at (1 0 0) for the Re-doped and parent samples are shown in Fig. 5(a) and Fig. 5(b), respectively. The resolution conditions for the (1 0 0) energy scan (Fig. 5(a)) were slightly different, with a setting of 0.53°-PG-0.48°-S-0.55°-PG-1.2°. Compared to the parent compound with a spin gap of 1.75 meV, the incommensurate fluctuations are peaked at a lower energy of 1.38 meV, a reduction of 72%, which tracks the reduction of $T_0$. Within a nesting picture, it appears that the Re impurities (chemical pressure) greatly weaken the nesting present in the pure system.

As temperature is increased, the incommensurate fluctuations are destroyed much more quickly than are the...
incommensurate fluctuations at (1 0 0). Thus the hidden order gap for (1 0 0) antiferromagnetic fluctuations becomes less well defined. Both the commensurate (Fig. 3(a)) and incommensurate (Fig. 4(a)) spectral form is that of a resonant frequency that decays into the Re-induced continuum of the itinerant particle-hole states. The Re doping achieves this, we suggest, by broadening of the nesting that gave the well-defined correlation lengths are narrow in wavevector for low energies, but broaden dramatically at higher energies. The black vertical line shows the centroid of the scattering arising from a column of itinerant excitations in the E-Q plane. The error bars for low energy fits lie within the symbol size.

Our results demonstrate that the commensurate spin fluctuations lose much of their collective peaking as nesting is disturbed by approach to the presumed ferromagnetic quantum critical point. In addition, we find that the lifetime of the spin fluctuations, or more likely the fermions from which they arise, are shorter in the Re-doped compound. The observation of a commensurate spin gap indicates that the hidden order phase survives at least half-way to the quantum critical point albeit in a weakened form. Our neutron results therefore show that the effect of Re doping, in contrast to the antiferromagnetic enhancement and hidden order destruction by Rh-doping [18, 19], is to weaken, but surprisingly, not to destroy the hidden order on approach to the quantum phase transition to ferromagnetism. This is consistent with the part of the hidden order phase boundary inferred from specific heat measurements [19 20].

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