#### EUROPEAN ORGANIZATION FOR NUCLEAR RESEARCH

Proposal to the ISOLDE and Neutron Time-of-Flight Committee

#### Study of the neutron skin and soft dipole resonance in  ${}^{8}$ He.

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## 1 Introduction

Most of the effort of modern nuclear physics is devoted to understanding how matter is structured at large N/Z imbalance. It is near and beyond the drip lines of the nuclear chart where the most fascinating and astonishing phenomena appear as a consequence of intricate microscopic interaction between the constituents of the nucleus. In fact, only a small amount of nucleons is needed to form systems with very different quantum properties. This is the case of the helium isotope chain where we can find numerous interesting features: <sup>4</sup>He is the most stable cluster found in almost every isotope under certain conditions and the ideal isotope to probe tensor correlations. <sup>6</sup>He and <sup>8</sup>He are Borromean halos with abnormal neutron separation energies and with no bound excited states. In particular, <sup>8</sup>He has the largest  $N/Z = 3$  of all known bound isotopes. The halo features give rise to peculiar collective modes such as soft dipole or giant dipole resonances, very prominent in loosely bound light nuclei.

The halo nature of both, <sup>6</sup>He and <sup>8</sup>He was unveiled by means of interaction cross sections  $[1, 2]$  $[1, 2]$ , proton elastic  $[3, 4]$  $[3, 4]$  and inelastic scattering  $[5]$ , charge-exchange  $[6]$ , break-up [\[7\]](#page-9-1) and transfer reactions [\[8,](#page-9-2) [9\]](#page-9-3). From these experiments the rms matter radii  $R_m$  = 2.45 $\pm$ 0.10 fm for <sup>6</sup>He and  $R_m$  = 2.53 $\pm$ 0.08 fm for <sup>8</sup>He, from which the properties of the halo are inferred [\[10\]](#page-9-4), was consistently deduced. Both rms are much larger than the one of <sup>4</sup>He (1.457), but very similar. This has been interpreted in terms of neutron skin vs halo [\[10\]](#page-9-4). The difference between them is subtle and hard to determine experimentally: the size of the neutron skin can be determined according to  $r_{skin} = r_m^{rms} - r_p^{rms}$ , the difference between the neutron and proton density distributions. On the other hand, halo nuclei feature a largely extended neutron density distribution. According to this picture, the difference of the density distributions between  ${}^{6}$ He and  ${}^{8}$ He has shown indicating the difference between a neutron skin and a neutron halo. The strongest evidence that supports the <sup>8</sup>He neutron skin was inferred from the analysis of the energy dependence of the reaction cross sections, from 40A to 120A MeV. Glauber calculations with density distributions consisting of a core plus a halo contributions were compared to the data [\[11\]](#page-9-5). The distributions were adjusted taking into account that the low energy cross section is more sensitive the the lower density part of the distribution. The <sup>6</sup>He needs a longer tail, compared to <sup>8</sup>He.

The neutron skin of <sup>8</sup>He was also deduced in an experiment that measured inelastic scattering and transfer reactions simultaneously, including  ${}^{8}He(p,t)$  [\[12,](#page-9-6) [13\]](#page-10-0). Using the Coupled Reaction Channels (CRC) framework which includes direct transfer of twoneutrons, two-step transfer via  ${}^{8}He(p, d)<sup>7</sup>He$  reaction, and coupling between the  $0^+$  and  $2^+$  states in <sup>6</sup>He, the spectroscopic factors for  $0^+$  and  $2^+$  were found to be 1.0 and 0.014 respectively which shows a very small contribution of the  ${}^{6}He(2^+)$  state in  ${}^{8}He$ . The  ${}^{8}He$ neutron skin was deduced (0.6 fm) considering that the g.s. is a mixture of  $(1p_{3/2})^4$  and  $(1p^{3/2})^2$   $(1p_{1/2})^2$ . The conclusions of the CRC analysis in <sup>8</sup>He are quite different from the predictions from the cluster orbital shell model which suggests a <sup>4</sup>He+4n core, more on the 4 valence neutron halo idea [\[14\]](#page-10-1). The  $p(^{8}He, t)$  reaction was also studied investigated in a different with higher bombarding energy  $61A \text{ MeV}$  [\[15\]](#page-10-2). The reaction was found to populate both the ground state and the  $2^+$  excited state of  ${}^6\textrm{He}$ , contrary to what was inferred in the other  $(p,t)$  experiment. The inverse reaction,  ${}^{8}He(t,p)$  was measured few years ago with the conclusion that the ratio of spectroscopic factors be the <sup>6</sup>He g.s. and 2 <sup>+</sup> state does not depend on a strong configuration mixing as mentioned before, as this would imply a reduction on the  $N = 6$  sub-shell closure [\[9\]](#page-9-3), which is incompatible with the large separation energy of  ${}^{8}$ He with respect to  ${}^{6}$ He and the higher excitation energy of the 2<sup>+</sup>. This stands as a conflicting situation that demands more precise measurements.



<span id="page-2-0"></span>Figure 1: Excitation energy spectrum for the  ${}^6\text{He}(t,p){}^8\text{He}$  at 30A MeV. From Ref [\[9\]](#page-9-3)



<span id="page-2-1"></span>Figure 2: Spectrum of Fig [1](#page-2-0) compared to the theoretical profile of the  $2^+$  state with and without a possible contribution of the 1<sup>−</sup> continuum. The theoretical curves are convoluted with the experimental resolution. From Ref [\[9\]](#page-9-3)

Generally speaking, the spectroscopic information about <sup>8</sup>He is rather poor. The value of the first excited state  $2^+$  varies from 2.7 to 3.6 MeV. The authors of Ref. [\[12\]](#page-9-6) report another resonance above 5.4 MeV without any spin-parity assignment, but the excitation

energy spectrum is not shown. The  ${}^6\text{He}(t,p)$  spectrum, shown in Fig. [1](#page-2-0) reported in Ref. [\[9\]](#page-9-3) show very intriguing features. Two new states are reported: one at 5.5 MeV with 1 <sup>+</sup>, and an evidence of a state at around 7.5 MeV with unassigned spin-parity. However, the most interesting aspect is the possible existence of a soft dipole resonance  $(1^-)$  at around 3 MeV and evidenced by the presence of near  ${}^{6}He+n+n$  threshold events [\[16\]](#page-10-3) (see Fig. [2\)](#page-2-1). This type of resonance is not unexpected in loosely bound nuclei. It was also observed in <sup>11</sup>Li using proton and deuteron resonant scattering [\[17,](#page-10-4) [18\]](#page-10-5). Although this type of resonance is interpreted as a vibration of the halo neutrons against the nucleons of the core moving in phase, it can be also viewed as a particle-particle state with two correlated halo neutrons acting as a nucleon Copper pair around an inert core [\[19,](#page-10-6) [20\]](#page-11-0). To investigate such low-energy dipole modes, two-neutron transfer reactions stands as one of the most promising tools. It is worth mentioning that no angular distributions were reported for this measurement.

In conclusion, the correct interpretation of the <sup>8</sup>He structure requires a new measurement with improved resolution and the determination of angular distributions to elucidate the proper spectroscopic factors and spin-parity of the states, mandatory to interpret a possible soft-dipole resonance in this nucleus.

## 2 Experimental details

We will use the ISS to analyze protons from the  $(t,p)$  reaction on <sup>6</sup>He at 10 MeV/u. We request a beam intensity of around  $10<sup>6</sup>$  pps, based on previous experimental data  $(4.70\times10^7 \text{ Yield}/\mu\text{C}$  [\[21\]](#page-11-1)) and confirmed by the beam development group [\[22\]](#page-11-2). The requested beam intensity, ideal to perform this experiment, is a conservative value lower than the previously achieved at the facility. It has been adopted to consider a possible reduction of possible contaminants from beam tuning and the ISS rate capability. We will use a titanium tritide target with an effective thickness of  $\sim$ 45 µg/cm<sup>2</sup> in  $\sim$ 450 µg/cm<sup>2</sup> of titanium. A similar target will be used for the IS695 experiment approved in the last INTC 67. The Si array, which surrounds the beam axis, is upstream of the target inside the solenoid. Simulations, shown in Fig. [3,](#page-4-0) suggest that an optimal set up will use a field of 2 T, with the Si array covering a distance of approximately  $-450 < \Delta z < -100$  mm from the target. The information about the  ${}^{8}$ He energy levels used in the simulation was obtained from the NNDC data base. Recoil detection will be achieved by means of annular silicon detectors in a telescope arrangement to determine energy loss and residual energy. These detectors impose an cut of  $\theta_{\rm c.m.} > 10^{\circ}$ , due to the inner diameter of the annular detectors. We note that the reactions to unbound states will be clearly separated in the recoil detector. The recoil detector will be placed at 350 mm downstream of the target.

A very similar proof-of-principle experiment was performed at FRIB in August 2021 with a reaccelerated <sup>10</sup>Be beam. Figure [4](#page-4-1) shows a very preliminary excitation energy spectrum of the  ${}^{10}Be(t,p)$  obtained with SOLARIS [\[23\]](#page-11-3) using a tritium loaded target with an effective tritium thickness of 20  $\mu$ g/cm<sup>2</sup>. The average beam intensity was around  $10<sup>6</sup>$  pps (instantaneous rate) during a running time of 7 days. The excitation energy



<span id="page-4-0"></span>Figure 3: Simulation of the reaction taking into account the ISS geometry and the <sup>8</sup>He levels with their width. The excitation energy resolution was assumed to be 150 keV (FWHM), the typical values achieved in the ISS (HELIOS).

spectrum (preliminary resolution better than 200 keV FWHM) is almost background free thanks to the simultaneous detection of the heavy recoil and the excellent rejection of random coincidences using the timing between detectors. Taking into account that the time structure of the reaccelerated beam is similar to the ones produces in ISOLDE, it is clear that the ISS is an ideal instrument to perform  $(t, p)$  reactions with excellent resolution with titanium tritide targets.



<span id="page-4-1"></span>Figure 4: Excitation energy spectrum for the  ${}^{10}Be(t,p){}^{12}Be$  obtained with SOLARIS at 10A MeV [\[23\]](#page-11-3). The X axis referes to MeV. The  $^{12}$ Be states can be clearly identified.

#### 3 Beam time request and estimates

Rate estimates are based on the assumption of an angular coverage of  $10^{\circ} \lesssim \theta_{\rm c.m.} \lesssim 45^{\circ}$ , with a  $70\%$  efficiency in the azimuthal angle and  $94\%$  efficiency in the theta angle. The differential cross section (Ref. [\[24\]](#page-11-4)) for the  ${}^6\text{He}(t,p){}^8\text{He}(gs)$  has been determined taking into account a <sup>8</sup>He wave function with  $(p_{3/2})^2$ ,  $(p_{1/2})^2$ , and  $(s_{1/2})^2$  [\[25\]](#page-11-5) and calculated optical potentials (see Fig. [5\)](#page-5-0). To estimate the amount of beam time needed, we use a conservative differential cross section of 0.5 mb/sr averaged from the angular domain covered by the detector. These cross sections are consistent with the ones reported in Ref. [\[9\]](#page-9-3), measured at higher beam energy (25A MeV). In 7 days of measurement we will obtain, on average, around 70 counts per angular bin  $(5<sup>o</sup>)$ .



<span id="page-5-0"></span>Figure 5: Calculated differential cross sections for  ${}^{6}He(t,p){}^{8}He(gs)$  using the formalism of Ref. [\[24\]](#page-11-4).

**Summary of requested shifts:** We request 21 shifts of beam time to study the  $(t,p)$ reaction on  ${}^{6}$ He at 10 MeV/u in inverse kinematics with the ISS to clarify the structure of <sup>8</sup>He and locate a plausible soft dipole resonance. In addition, recoil detection will be required to reject protons from reactions on titanium and other reaction channels as demonstrated in a previous experiment. The number of shifts requested is based on a beam of 1 MHz on target. We will use a titanium tritide target with an effective tritium thickness of  $45g/cm^2$ . It is expected that Q-value resolution of 150 keV will be achieved. In addition, we request 3 shifts to perform the  ${}^{4}He(t,p)$  reaction for calibration purposes. In total, we request 21 shifts of radioactive  ${}^{6}$ He and 3 shift of stable  ${}^{4}$ He.

# Appendix 1

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED EXPERIMENT

The experimental setup comprises: The ISOLDE Solenoidal Spectrometer



HAZARDS GENERATED BY THE EXPERIMENT (if using fixed installation:) Hazards named in the document relevant for the fixed ISS installation.

Additional hazards:







Hazard identification:

Average electrical power requirements (excluding fixed ISOLDE-installation mentioned above): N/A

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