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*A.A. Gippius<sup>1,2</sup>, E.N. Morozova<sup>1,2</sup>, K.S. Okhotnikov<sup>1,\*</sup>, A.S. Moskvina<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Moscow State University, Faculty of Physics, Moscow 119992, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Crystallography RAS, Moscow 117333, Russia

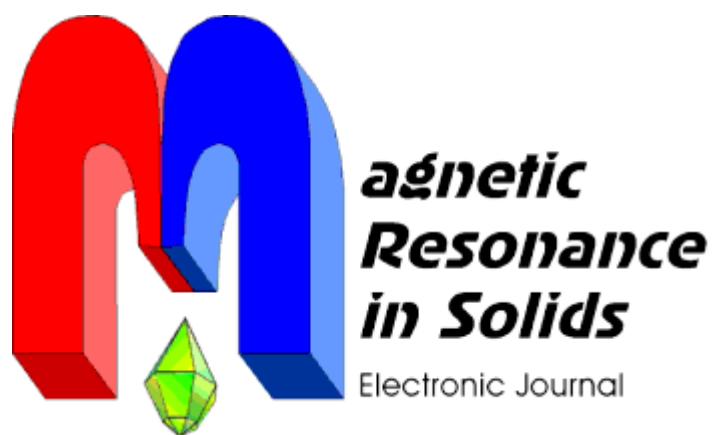
<sup>3</sup>Ural State University, Ekaterinburg 620083, Russia

\* *E-mail*: okhotkir@mail.ru

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**NMR study of quasi-1D magnetic chain in cuprates  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$**

A.A. Gippius<sup>1,2</sup>, E.N. Morozova<sup>1,2</sup>, K.S. Okhotnikov<sup>1,\*</sup>, A.S. Moskvin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Moscow State University, Faculty of Physics, Moscow 119992, Russia*

<sup>2</sup> *Institute of Crystallography RAS, Moscow 117333, Russia*

<sup>3</sup> *Ural State University, Ekaterinburg 620083, Russia*

\* *E-mail: okhotkir@mail.ru*

NMR investigation of magnetic structure and phase transitions in two isostructural quasi-one-dimensional cuprates  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  has been performed. While  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  exhibits a magnetic phase transition at  $T_c = 24$  K,  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  orders magnetically at around 13 K.  $^6\text{Li}$  and  $^{23}\text{Na}$  NMR spectra in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ , respectively, provide an unambiguous experimental evidence that below  $T_c$  an incommensurate in-chain helical spin structure is established in both compounds. However, the features of the observed low temperature NMR are different pointing to different properties of the helical magnetic structure.

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**Keywords:** Nuclear magnetic resonance, quadrupole resonance, incommensurate spin

## 1. Introduction

The quasi-1D spin chain cuprate  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  exhibits a unique sequence of phase transitions at  $T = 24, 22.5,$  and  $9$  K [1,2] resembling the “Devil’s staircase” type behavior. Recently we have obtained the first NMR evidence for a low temperature incommensurate (IC) in-chain spin structure in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  [3]. It was shown that below the magnetic ordering temperature  $T_c = 24$  K the  $^7\text{Li}$  NMR lineshape is determined by a IC static modulation of the local magnetic field caused by spin structure of Cu magnetic moments twisted along the chain axis [3]. This result was confirmed by NMR spectra measurements on the  $^6\text{Li}$  isotope as well as by neutron diffraction study [4].

The larger ionic radius of  $\text{Na}^{1+}$  ( $0.97 \text{ \AA}$  against  $0.68 \text{ \AA}$  of  $\text{Li}^{1+}$ ) favors the higher degree of in-chain crystallographic order and hence increasing one-dimensionality of magnetic properties in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . This results in lower magnetic ordering temperature  $T_c = 12.6$  K [5] and lower values of local magnetic fields in the ordered state. In this paper we report first  $^{23}\text{Na}$  NMR measurements which confirm the existence of incommensurate magnetic structure in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  at  $3$  K also seen by  $\mu\text{SR}$  [5]. The unusual magnetic properties of 1D chain cuprates  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  are discussed in terms of strong in-chain frustration and intrinsic incommensurability.

## 2. Experiment

Single crystals of  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  were synthesized according to the procedure described in Ref. [4]. The quality of the new  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  crystal was much better than that used in our preliminary NMR measurements reported in Ref. [3]. In contrast to  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$ , the  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  single crystal shows no twinning and has no deviation from the ideal stoichiometry as confirmed by X-ray.  $^{23}\text{Na}$  and  $^7\text{Li}$  NMR measurements were performed at several temperatures in the paramagnetic and in the ordered phases of both compounds. All three principal orientations of the external magnetic field with respect to the crystallographic axes:  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b},$  and  $\mathbf{c}$  were used. The standard pulsed field-sweep NMR technique was applied at fixed frequency of  $33.7$  MHz for  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $46.0$  MHz for  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ .

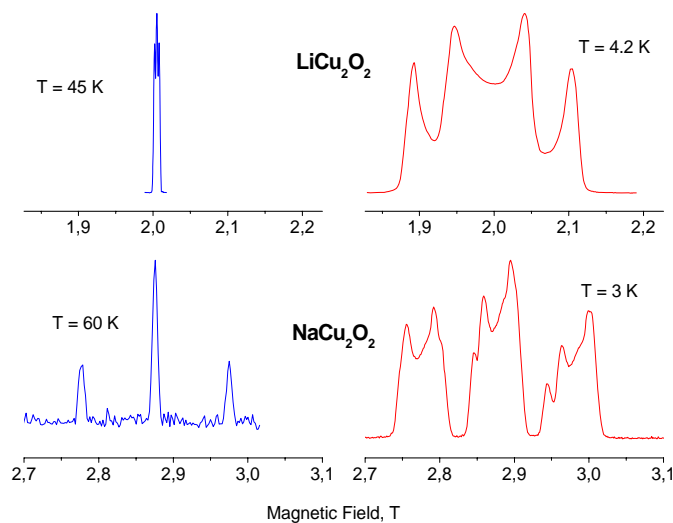
## 3. Results and discussion

We present the characteristic NMR spectra of  $^7\text{Li}$  in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $^{23}\text{Na}$  in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  measured both above and below magnetic ordering temperature  $T_c$  for orientation of the external magnetic field  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{c}$  (Fig.1). To make the comparison more convenient we use the same scaling of magnetic field in both panels. Above  $T_c$  in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  typical first-order quadrupole perturbed NMR spectra for spin  $I = 3/2$  nuclei are observed. The quadrupole splitting between the satellites in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  is about  $200$  mT, while in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  it is about  $10$  mT. Since the ratio of quadrupole moments  $Q(^{23}\text{Na})/Q(^7\text{Li}) = 2.7$ , this large quadrupole splitting ratio means that the electric field gradient (EFG) at Na site in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  is almost an order of magnitude higher than the EFG at Li sites in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . This result reflects an enhanced role of EFG polarization effect on  $\text{Na}^{1+}$  as compared with  $\text{Li}^{1+}$ , which has only weakly polarizable  $1s^2$  shell.

Below magnetic ordering temperature  $T_c$  the spectra of both compounds exhibit a dramatic change. The spectra are characteristic of IC static modulation of the local magnetic field caused by helical spin structure of Cu moments [3,6,7]. It is worth to mention, that the phase transition at  $T_c$  is much narrower in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  than in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . The formation of IC field modulation in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  occurs within  $0.6$  K while in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  it takes more than  $2$  K [3]. The asymmetric van Hove singularities of  $^{23}\text{Na}$  NMR central transition line are very sharp and are clearly visible also on satellite transitions, which in contrast to  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  are well separated due to the larger EFG. The lineshape of the satellite transitions follows

the distribution of the Larmor frequency caused by IC local field modulation. Therefore, in the first-order quadrupole perturbation the satellite lineshape is almost the exact copy of the central transition profile.

The most striking difference between  $^7\text{Li}$  and  $^{23}\text{Na}$  spectra is that in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  the doublets (or degenerated quartets) are observed for all three principal orientations of external magnetic field in the magnetically ordered state. For  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{a}$  the intensities of both parts of the doublets are equal while for  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{c}$  the high field component of the doublet is more intensive. This anisotropy becomes more significant with decreasing temperature. The splitting is almost symmetric with respect to the central field determined as the resonance field of the central transition above  $T_c$ . These results are completely unlike the situation in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  where the  $^7\text{Li}$  NMR quartet and sextet are observed for  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{c}$  (Fig.1) and  $\mathbf{H} \parallel (\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b})$  [3]. The possible reason for such dissimilar behavior could be the influence of



**Fig.1.**  $^7\text{Li}$  and  $^{23}\text{Na}$  NMR spectra measured above  $T_c$  (left spectra) and below  $T_c$  (right spectra) for  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{c}$  in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  single crystals at  $33.7$  and  $46.0$  MHz, respectively.

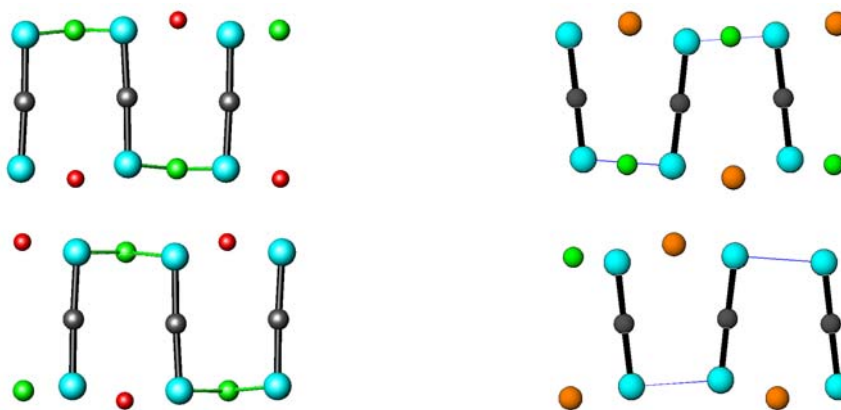


Fig.2. Crystal structure of  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  (left panel) and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  (right panel).

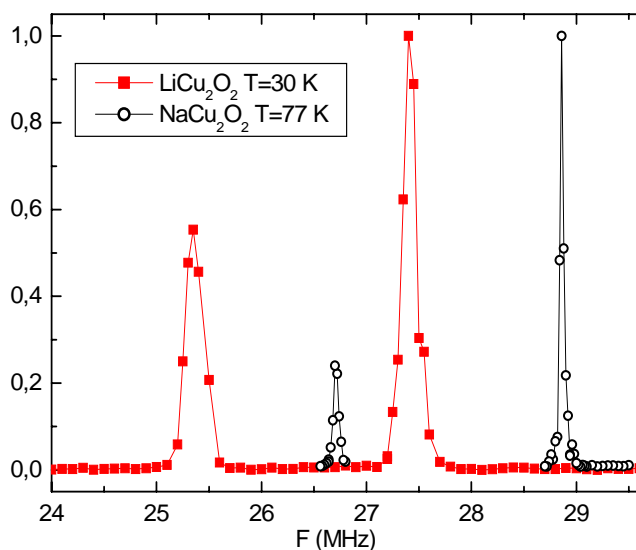


Fig.3. NQR spectra of  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  (black open circles) and  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  (red filled squares) measured above  $T_c$  on  $^{63,65}\text{Cu}$  nuclei in  $\text{Cu}(2)$  site.

seen that in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  the NQR linewidth is a factor of 3 smaller than that in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . This result reflects more homogeneous EFG distribution as a consequence of higher degree of structural order in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . Probably for the same reason, we succeeded to find another  $^{63}\text{Cu}$  line at 26.8 MHz originating from the  $\text{Cu}(1)$  position. It should be noted that the  $^{63}\text{Cu}$  line at around 27 MHz has been observed earlier on the polycrystalline  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  sample in [8], but it was falsely assigned to the  $\text{Cu}(1)$  position. In this case, the line should exist also below  $T_c$  which contradicts to our experimental findings described below.

All lines shown in Fig. 3 completely disappear below  $T_c$ . Instead, in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  we observed very complicated  $^{63,65}\text{Cu}$  antiferromagnetic resonance (AFMR) spectrum at 4.2 K. This effect is caused by the space modulated internal magnetic field at the  $\text{Cu}(2)$  site in the ordered state of  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . For yet unknown reason we did not find any copper AFMR spectrum in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . At the same time, the  $\text{Cu}(1)$  NQR line at 26.8 MHz exists even below  $T_c$ , as expected for non-magnetic  $\text{Cu}^+$  ion at the  $\text{Cu}(1)$  site which is symmetric with respect to magnetic  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions in the  $\text{CuO}_2$  chains. Therefore, the complete cancellation of local magnetic field occurs at  $\text{Cu}(1)$  site in the ordered state of  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ .

In conclusion,  $^7\text{Li}$  and  $^{23}\text{Na}$  NMR spectra measured in the magnetically ordered state of the isostructural quasi-1D oxides  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  give unambiguously evidence for static IC modulation of local magnetic fields at the Li and the Na site, respectively. This modulation is caused by a helical spin structure of Cu moments below  $T_c$ . Due to the crystal structure peculiarities the character of the magnetic helix is dissimilar in both compounds reflected both in NMR and NQR spectra.

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non-magnetic Li defects in  $\text{CuO}_2$  chains of  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$ . Due to AF character of NNN interaction the both helix phase angles  $\theta$  and  $\varphi$  exhibit a step-like change on  $\pi$  in the vicinity of Li defect. This phenomenon will be analyzed in more detail elsewhere.

The value of the local magnetic field on Na site estimated as the linewidth at the base of the central transition for  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \mathbf{c}$  is only 80 mT, which is a factor of 3 less than that for Li (250 mT). This is quite reasonable since the transition temperature in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  is lower than in  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  pointing to a weaker inter-chain interaction in  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$ .

The difference in crystal structure peculiarities of the two compounds (Fig. 2) is reflected in their NQR properties. Fig.3 shows the NQR spectra of  $\text{NaCu}_2\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{LiCu}_2\text{O}_2$  measured above  $T_c$  on  $^{63,65}\text{Cu}$  nuclei in  $\text{Cu}(2)$  site. The right and left lines of each pair are assigned to the  $^{63}\text{Cu}$  and the  $^{65}\text{Cu}$  isotope, respectively. The observed frequency and intensity ratios correspond to ratios of isotope quadrupole moments and natural abundances, respectively. In the following, we will consider only the  $^{63}\text{Cu}$  isotope NQR lines for convenience. From Fig. 3 it is clearly

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