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# Space-charge effects in Penning ion traps

T. Porobić<sup>a,\*</sup>, M. Beck<sup>e</sup>, M. Breitenfeldt<sup>a</sup>, C. Couratin<sup>c,1</sup>, P. Finlay<sup>a</sup>, A. Knecht<sup>a,b,2</sup>, X. Fabian<sup>c</sup>, P. Friedag<sup>e</sup>, X. Flécharde<sup>c</sup>, E. Liénard<sup>c</sup>, G. Ban<sup>c</sup>, D. Zákoucký<sup>d</sup>, G. Soti<sup>a</sup>, S. Van Gorp<sup>a,3</sup>, Ch. Weinheimer<sup>e</sup>, E. Wursten<sup>a</sup>, N. Severijns<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>KU Leuven, Instituut voor Kern- en Stralingsfysica, Celestijnenlaan 200D, 3001 Leuven, Belgium

<sup>b</sup>PH Department, CERN, CH-1211 Geneva 23, Switzerland

<sup>c</sup>LPC Caen, ENSICAEN, Universit de Caen, CNRS/IN2P3, F-14070 Caen, France

<sup>d</sup>Nuclear Physics Institute, ASCR, 250 68 Rež, Czech Republic

<sup>e</sup>Universität Münster, Institut für Kernphysik, Wilhelm-Klemm-Strasse 9, D-48149 Münster, Germany

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## Abstract

The influence of space-charge on ion cyclotron resonances and magnetron eigenfrequency in a gas-filled Penning ion trap has been investigated. Off-line measurements with  $^{39}\text{K}^+$  using the cooling trap of the WITCH retardation spectrometer-based setup at ISOLDE/CERN were performed. Experimental ion cyclotron resonances were compared with *ab initio* Coulomb simulations and found to be in agreement. As an important systematic effect of the WITCH experiment, the magnetron eigenfrequency of the ion cloud was studied under increasing space-charge conditions. Finally, the helium buffer gas pressure in the Penning trap was determined by comparing experimental cooling rates with simulations.

*Keywords:* ion beam, Penning trap, space-charge, magnetron motion, ion trapping, buffer gas cooling, ion cyclotron resonance

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Penning ion traps have become established as versatile tools for trapping charged particles in plasma physics, atomic physics, as well as nuclear and particle physics. Specific applications include beam preparation [1], mass spectrometry [2], nuclear decay studies [3], antimatter studies [4], strongly coupled plasmas [5] and low energy precision measurements of fundamental interactions [6].

The Weak Interaction Trap for CHarged particles (WITCH) [7, 8], the focus of this work, is a double Penning trap system situated at ISOLDE/CERN and aiming at determining the  $\beta$ - $\nu$  angular correlation coefficient  $a$  in the mirror  $\beta$ -decay of  $^{35}\text{Ar}$  to a precision better than 0.5%. In the Standard model, nuclear  $\beta$ -decay is modelled as a purely V (vector) - A (axial-vector) interaction. However, Lorentz invariance also allows scalar, tensor and pseudo scalar interaction components. At present, the existence of scalar and tensor currents is experimentally ruled out to a precision of only about 10% [9]. The  $\beta$ - $\nu$  angular correlation coefficient's sensitivity to the exotic scalar current in the case of  $^{35}\text{Ar}$  in principle allows providing stringent

experimental constraints on physics beyond the Standard Model [8, 6, 10, 11].

The WITCH Penning traps act as a scattering-free source of radioactive  $^{35}\text{Ar}$ , typically containing large ion clouds (with  $10^4$ - $10^6$  ions) to enhance statistics. However, if more than one ion is present in a Penning trap, the trapping potential deviates from the quadrupolar shape and causes shifting of motional eigenfrequencies, as well as shifting and widening of the ion cyclotron resonance frequency required for sideband cooling [1, 12]. Moreover, centering becomes more difficult due to Coulomb repulsion. Consequently, this hampers efficient ion cloud cooling, centering and purification. Space-charge thus significantly contributes to systematic effects caused by source properties, i.e. ion cloud dimensions and temperature. Ion clouds of this size and density are still not fully in the plasma régime, and are therefore beyond reach of both single particle and collective motion analytical frameworks. Numerical simulation presently remains the only feasible way of modelling such phenomena. For this purpose, the Simbuca [13] simulation package was employed in this work on Graphical Processor Units (GPUs), taking advantage of their intrinsic parallelism.

Many other Penning trap experiments experience limitations caused by space charge-related effects. ISOLTRAP's precision mass spectrometry depends on precise determination of the ions' fast eigenmotion frequency and efficient isobar purification at the MR-ToF device [14], both being affected by frequency shifts and other space-charge phenomena [15]. REXTRAP [16], a high-capacity preparation trap at ISOLDE, aims for mass-selective operation, as well

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\*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: tomica.porobic@fys.kuleuven.be

<sup>1</sup>present address: KU Leuven, Instituut voor Kern- en Stralingsfysica, Celestijnenlaan 200D, 3001 Leuven, Belgium

<sup>2</sup>present address: Paul Scherrer Institut, 5232 Villigen PSI, Switzerland

<sup>3</sup>present address: Atomic Physics Laboratory, RIKEN, Saitama 351-0198, Japan

54 as efficient cooling of large ( $10^8$ ) ion clouds. PIPERADE<sub>100</sub>  
 55 [17] (currently under construction) is a high-capacity iso-  
 56 bar separator for the SPIRAL2/DESIR facility, the oper-<sub>101</sub>  
 57 ation of it being limited by a space-charge induced fre-  
 58 quency broadening and shift of the sideband cooling fre-  
 59 quency.

60 In the case of WITCH, understanding of such phenom-<sub>103</sub>  
 61 ena is essential not only for efficient tuning and opera-<sub>104</sub>  
 62 tion of the traps, but also for an accurate characterization  
 63 of the systematic effects observed in on-line experiments.<sub>105</sub>  
 64 Furthermore, successful numerical simulation is important  
 65 for gaining a deeper understanding of space-charge effects  
 66 in current Penning trap experiments, as well as for the  
 67 design of future ones. In this work, a systematic experi-<sub>109</sub>  
 68 mental and computational study of space-charge effects on  
 69 ion motional modes and buffer-gas cooling efficiency is pre-<sub>111</sub>  
 70 sented, thereby extending earlier work that was reported,<sub>112</sub>  
 71 in [18, 1, 19, 13]

## 72 2. Nonneutral plasma in a Penning trap

### 73 2.1. Penning trap principles

74 Charged particles are axially confined in a Penning trap<sub>118</sub>  
 75 by a strong axial magnetic field  $\mathbf{B} = B\hat{\mathbf{e}}_z$  and radially by<sub>119</sub>  
 76 an electrostatic quadrupolar potential of the form

$$77 \quad U = \frac{U_0}{2d^2}(z^2 - r^2/2), \quad (1)_{122}$$

78 where  $U_0$  is the potential between the end cap and ring<sub>124</sub>  
 79 electrodes, and  $d$  a parameter given by the trap geometry,<sub>125</sub>  
 80 characterizing the depth of the potential well.

81 The motion of a single particle is then a superposition<sub>127</sub>  
 82 of three eigenmotions with corresponding eigenfrequencies:<sub>128</sub>  
 83 the magnetron ( $\omega_-$ ), the axial harmonic ( $\omega_z$ ), and the<sub>129</sub>  
 84 modified cyclotron ( $\omega_+$ ) motion. The radial frequencies<sub>130</sub>  
 85 satisfy equation

$$86 \quad \omega_{\pm} = \frac{\omega_c}{2} \pm \sqrt{\frac{\omega_c^2}{2} - \frac{\omega_z^2}{2}}, \quad (2)_{132}$$

87 while the axial frequency is given by

$$88 \quad \omega_z = \sqrt{\frac{qU_0}{md^2}}, \quad (3)_{135}$$

89 where  $q$  and  $m$  are the charge and mass of the ion. The sum  
 90 of the two radial frequencies is the true cyclotron frequency  
 91 ( $\omega_c$ ), given by

$$92 \quad \omega_c = \omega_+ + \omega_- = \frac{q}{m}B. \quad (4)_{140}$$

93 The three eigenfrequencies satisfy the following inequality:<sub>142</sub>  
 94  $\omega_- \ll \omega_z \ll \omega_+$ . After entering the trap, ions start losing<sub>143</sub>  
 95 their kinetic energy via collisions with the buffer gas. This<sub>144</sub>  
 96 interaction can be modelled phenomenologically by a con-<sub>145</sub>  
 97 tinuous drag force acting in the direction opposite to the<sub>146</sub>  
 98 ions' motion:

$$99 \quad \mathbf{F} = -\delta m \mathbf{v}, \quad (5)_{149}$$

where  $\delta$  is the damping constant, given by:

$$\delta = \frac{q}{K_{mob}} \frac{p/p_N}{T/T_N}, \quad (6)$$

with  $K_{mob}$  the reduced ion mobility, and  $p/p_N$  and  $T/T_N$   
 the gas pressure and temperature relative to normal pres-  
 sure and temperature, respectively. In this model, the ax-  
 ial harmonic oscillation and reduced cyclotron radial mo-  
 tion amplitude ( $R_+$ ) are damped, while the magnetron  
 motion is unstable, and its amplitude ( $R_-$ ) increases as:

$$R(t) = R_{\pm}(0)e^{(\mp\delta(\omega_{\pm}/(\omega_- + \omega_+))t)}. \quad (7)$$

This effect can be mitigated by coupling the magnetron  
 motion to either the axial or the reduced cyclotron mo-  
 tions via radio-frequency (RF) excitations at the sum of  
 frequencies of both motions. The latter coupling is usu-  
 ally used with ions, with the RF frequency  $\omega_{rf} = \omega_c =$   
 $\omega_+ + \omega_- = \omega_{cool}$  in the case of a single ion, where  $\omega_{cool}$   
 represents the *optimal* centering and cooling frequency of  
 the RF excitation, i.e. the frequency for which the highest  
 number of ions is centered. In this way, the radius of the  
 magnetron motion can be decreased, resulting in center-  
 ing and cooling of the trapped ions. This method, known  
 as buffer gas (or sideband) cooling [20], is used by many  
 Penning trap systems for ion cooling and centering, e.g.  
 REXTRAP, ISOLTRAP [21] and SHIPTRAP [22]. Be-  
 cause of its mass selectivity, it is also used for ion species  
 purification when magnetic beam separator resolution is  
 not sufficient.

With only one ion in the trap, the equations of mo-  
 tion can be solved analytically, with both the buffer gas  
 and the excitation field taken into account, resulting in  
 damped oscillatory interconversion of the fast and slow  
 radial motions:

$$R(t) = R_{\pm}(0)e^{(-\delta/2t)}. \quad (8)$$

This cooling and centering continues until thermal equi-  
 librium with the buffer gas is reached, limiting the final  
 amplitudes.

### 2.2. Many ions in a Penning trap

When more than one ion are present in a Penning trap,  
 the increased space-charge modifies the net potential influ-  
 encing the ions, and the observed effects start to diverge  
 from the single-particle theory outlined in the previous  
 subsection, making the problem difficult to approach an-  
 alytically. The space charge produced by  $\sim 10^5 - 10^7$   
 ions typically present in a high-capacity trap like WITCH  
 causes significant deviations from the single-particle pic-  
 ture, but still does not always satisfy the criterion for  
 a true plasma, i.e. the Debye length  $\lambda_D = \sqrt{kT/4\pi\rho^2}$ ,  
 where  $T$  and  $\rho$  are respectively the temperature and den-  
 sity, can still exceed the cloud's dimensions. Consequently,  
 numerical simulation is the only feasible approach for ion  
 cloud dynamics modelling in these cases. Nevertheless,

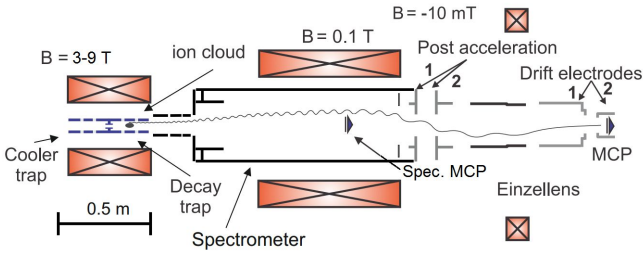


Figure 1: Schematic overview of the WITCH Penning traps with the retardation spectrometer, spectrometer MCP, re-acceleration section and position-sensitive MCP.

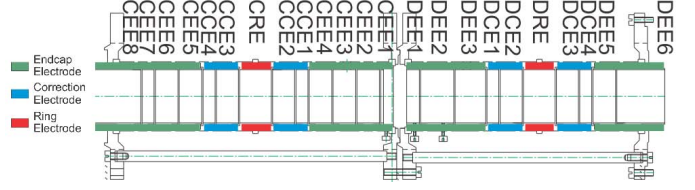


Figure 2: Schematic overview of the WITCH Penning traps with their electrodes marked (C stands for Cooler trap, and D for Decay trap). The pumping diaphragm between the traps is not shown. High voltage is applied on the end cap electrodes while ions still have high energy. A quadrupolar trapping potential around the trap center (CRE and DRE electrodes) is achieved with correction (CCE and DCE) and central ring electrodes. Ions are excited by a time dependent potential on the eight-fold segmented central ring electrodes. Figure taken from [31].

many plasma physics results remain valid in this intermediate region [23].

An ion cloud of a prolate spheroidal form and constant density in the center of a Penning trap will produce a radially outward electric field proportional to  $r$ , the radius. This field causes the  $\mathbf{E} \times \mathbf{B}$  drift, resulting in a rigid rotation of the cloud around its main axis, i.e. the fourth eigenmotion at the frequency

$$\omega_r = \frac{a(\alpha)\rho q}{\epsilon_0 B}, \quad (9)$$

where  $a$  is a coefficient determined by the spheroid aspect ratio  $\alpha$ ,  $\rho$  the ion cloud density and  $\epsilon_0$  the dielectric constant. Since the frequency  $\omega_{cool}$  is given in the reference frame of the ion cloud, the rotation causes an increase of the sideband cooling frequency in the laboratory frame,  $\omega'_{cool}$ . This shift amounts to  $2\omega_r$  in the ideal case [1], but if the density of the cloud is not constant, making its potential no longer quadratic, the problem becomes approachable only via numerical simulation. Through modifying the effective potential in the trap, the space-charge also changes the motional eigenfrequencies [24]:

$$\omega'_{\pm} = \frac{\omega_c}{2} \pm \sqrt{\left(\frac{\omega_c}{2}\right)^2 - \frac{1}{2}\omega_z^2 - \frac{\omega_p^2}{3}}, \quad (10)$$

where  $\omega_p^2 = \rho q / m\epsilon_0$  is the plasma frequency. This results in a decrease of the modified cyclotron frequency  $\omega_+$  and an increase of the magnetron frequency  $\omega_-$  with increasing space-charge. Equation 10 is valid for spherical ion clouds with constant density. The denominator of the plasma frequency term stems from the cloud shape, and for prolate ellipsoids becomes smaller than 3 [25].

### 3. Experimental setup

In a radioactive beam experiment with the WITCH setup (see Fig. 1), cooled bunches of  $^{35}\text{Ar}$  are prepared in REXTRAP and then sent into the WITCH beam line at 30 keV kinetic energy before being pulsed down to about 9 keV by a pulsed drift cavity [19]. They are further decelerated electrostatically to  $\sim 100$  eV before entering the

Cooler trap (CT), where they are captured in a nested potential (a low quadrupolar potential around the trap center with high box-like potential on the end caps) and thermalized with the helium buffer gas (to  $\sim 0.025$  eV), with a total efficiency of  $\sim 20\%$ . The cooled and centered ions are transferred to the second Penning trap (Decay trap, DT) that serves as a scattering-free source.  $^{35}\text{Cl}$  daughter ions recoil from the Decay trap into a retardation spectrometer (MAC-E filter [26]), where their integral energy spectrum is probed by a variable retardation barrier. Since the DT is situated in a high magnetic field region (typically 3 - 9 T) and the analysis plane of the retardation spectrometer is in a low field region (0.1 T), up to 98.33% of the ions' radial energy is converted to axial energy. The ions that pass the retarding potential are re-accelerated by a 3 kV potential and focused on a position sensitive Micro-Channel Plate (MCP) detector [27, 28].

All experiments presented in this work have been performed using stable  $^{39}\text{K}^+$  ions originating from REXTRAP's offline ion source and subsequently cooled and bunched by REXTRAP, or from WITCH's dedicated off-line surface ionization ion source with an RFQ for cooling and bunching [29].

#### 3.1. WITCH Penning traps

The WITCH ion trapping system [7, 30] consists of two cylindrical Penning traps (electrode layout shown in Fig 2). the first (CT) is used for preparation of the ion cloud using buffer gas and excitations, while the second (DT) serves as storage for the ion cloud and acts as a scattering-free radioactive source. To achieve sufficient vacuum conditions for the radioactive source and spectrometer, the DT is separated from the CT, which contains He buffer gas at  $10^{-5} - 10^{-4}$  mbar, by a differential pumping diaphragm of 2 mm diameter. They are both situated within a superconducting magnet with field homogeneity of  $\delta B \leq 10^{-5}$ .

The trap electrodes have a 4 cm diameter and are made of oxygen-free copper double-coated with Ni and Au. The CT is 25 cm, while the DT is 20 cm long. Each trap has an eightfold segmented central electrode for creating the

224 RF excitation potential. Their maximum ion capacity is  
 225 estimated to  $\sim 10^7$  ions, while the instantaneous capacity  
 226 depends on the potential well depth, with typical operating  
 227 values being in the range 0.5 – 15 V. The voltages on the  
 228 electrodes between the end cap and the central electrode  
 229 are scaled so as to produce a quadrupolar potential well in  
 230 the region of a few centimeters around the trap center.

231 The detection system used for these measurements consisted  
 232 of two MCP detectors (the first in front of the CT and the second  
 233 one behind the DT, in the spectrometer), a Faraday cup (FC)  
 234 situated in front of the traps on the same feedthrough as the  
 235 first MCP, and a full range pressure gauge close to the buffer  
 236 gas valve. Since this gauge is located outside the trap, it  
 237 was used only for indirect estimation of the buffer gas  
 238 pressure in the CT.

### 239 3.2. Measurement procedure

240 The number of ions entering the trap was controlled  
 241 via beam line electrodes with a switch (beam gate) before  
 242 the ions were pulsed down to low kinetic energies. As  
 243 the pulsed-down ions approached the CT, its lower end  
 244 cap electrode (CEE8 on Fig.2) was set below 0 V, while  
 245 the upper end cap (CEE1) was at a potential sufficient to  
 246 block the ions (50 - 200 V, depending on the tuning, Fig.  
 247 3a). When the bunch was fully within the trap, CEE8  
 248 was raised to the same potential as CEE1 (Fig. 3b). This  
 249 loading procedure was repeated several times if large ion  
 250 clouds were needed.

251 When the ions had lost enough kinetic energy through  
 252 buffer gas collisions, the end cap potentials were lowered  
 253 and the ions were fully confined by the quadrupolar po-  
 254 tential of the inner electrodes (Fig. 3c). Typically, this  
 255 process takes up to 200 ms, depending on the buffer gas  
 256 pressure. If needed, at this point a quadrupolar RF field  
 257 could be applied to center and compress the ion cloud.  
 258 For that purpose, the RF was applied at  $\omega_{cool}$  and 3 V  
 259 amplitude, for 20 - 120 ms.

260 Since radial compression via excitations can expand  
 261 the cloud axially, a short cooling period without excita-  
 262 tion to reduce axial amplitudes followed if needed. Finally,  
 263 the ions were ejected through the pumping diaphragm and  
 264 DT, both at 0 V (Fig 3d), and were detected with the di-  
 265 agnostic MCP in the spectrometer. Cooling and centering  
 266 efficiency for the particular measurement are given by the  
 267 number of ions passing through the diaphragm and being  
 268 detected on the MCP.

## 269 4. Experimental results

### 270 4.1. MCP Calibration

271 For estimating the absolute number of ions in the Pen-  
 272 ning trap, a calibrated, chevron-stacked, 4 cm diameter  
 273 MCP detector manufactured by Photonis was used. It was  
 274 operated in integral mode, adding all the charge impinging  
 275 on its surface into a single pulse. It was shown previously  
 276 that the area of such a pulse can accurately represent the

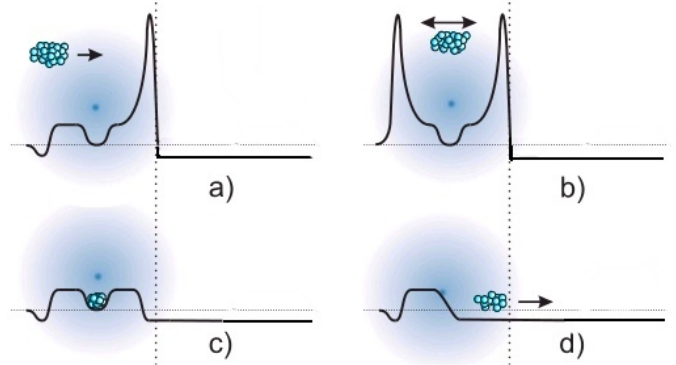


Figure 3: Operation of the cooler Penning trap. a) Ions entering the trap. b) High ( $\sim 100$  eV) energy ions trapped by the end caps. c) Ions cooled into a quadrupolar potential in the trap center, end caps potential lowered, excitations applied. d) Cloud ejected from the CT towards the diagnostic MCP behind the traps.

281 amount of charge impinging on the detector plates [28],  
 282 provided special care is taken to avoid saturation effects.  
 283 WITCH and REXTRAP's offline ion sources provided  $^{39}\text{K}$   
 284 cooled ion bunches used for this calibration. The ion num-  
 285 ber per bunch was varied using an electrode synchronized  
 286 with the measurement cycle as a beam gate. The MCP  
 287 plates were biased to -2 kV and the signal height and area  
 288 were read out by an oscilloscope connected to a PC running  
 289 a Labview based control and data acquisition system [32].  
 290 Calibration was performed using a Keithley 6514 electrome-  
 291 ter connected to a movable Faraday cup situated at the  
 292 same axial position in the beam line as the MCP. Care was  
 293 taken that both measuring devices capture the entire beam  
 294 profile. Faraday cup current readings for each beam gate  
 295 setting were averaged and recorded, together with MCP  
 296 pulse heights and areas. The pulse heights were found to  
 297 follow a linear dependence with the pulse areas and the  
 298 charge measured by the Faraday cup, as shown in Fig. 4.  
 299 This allowed using both the pulse areas and heights of the  
 300 calibrated MCP to estimate the true number of ions in the  
 301 Penning trap.

### 298 4.2. Effects of space-charge on cooling and centering

299 Like some other existing or planned Penning traps [1,  
 300 17], WITCH operates under high space-charge conditions,  
 301 leading to unwanted phenomena such as a shift and peak  
 302 broadening of the cyclotron cooling resonance. Earlier in-  
 303 vestigations have already identified the relevance of these  
 304 limiting factors for effective Penning trap operation [18, 1,  
 305 12, 15]. In the case of a single ion species, it was found  
 306 that both increased space-charge and increased buffer gas  
 307 pressure lead to higher optimal cyclotron cooling and cen-  
 308 tering frequencies  $\omega_{cool}$ , i.e. the frequencies corresponding  
 309 to the peak of the RF excitation resonance.

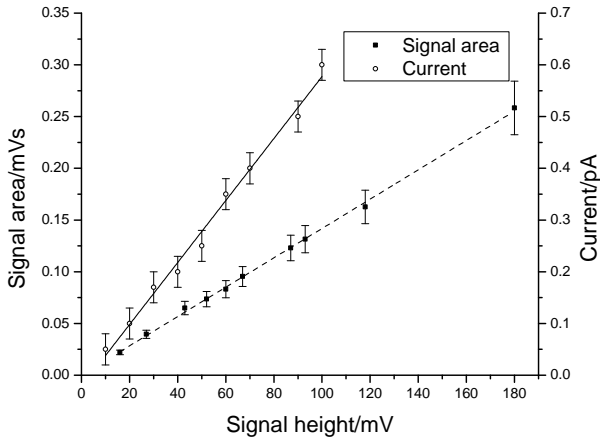


Figure 4: (right axis) Averaged ion beam current, measured with an electrometer connected to a Faraday cup, showing a linear dependence with the height of the signal on the MCP, validating the MCP calibration for ion bunches resulting in averaged currents below 0.6 pA. (left axis) Area of the MCP signal, showing a linear dependence with the height of the signal on the MCP.

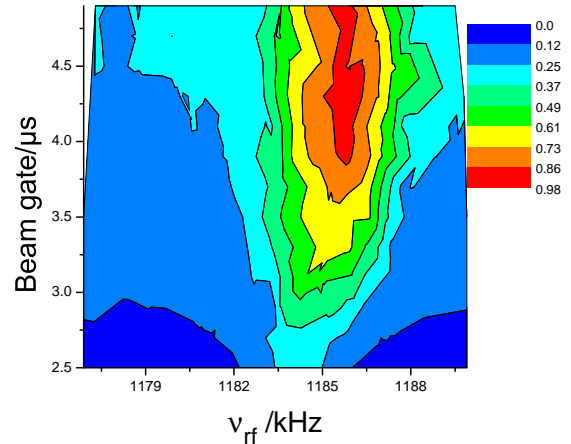


Figure 5: Dependence of the centered ions intensity in arbitrary units on the frequency of the excitation  $\nu_{rf} = \omega_{rf}/2\pi$  and beam gate duration. The trap contains up to about  $2 \times 10^5$  ions, depending on the beam gate. The resonance peak visibly shifts to higher frequencies for increased number of ions i.e. longer beam gate. The preparation sequence consisted of 200 ms buffer gas cooling without excitations, 80 ms cooling and centering with quadrupolar excitation at 3 V amplitude, and ejection. The buffer gas pressure was kept constant.

310 In this section, systematic effects of space-charge and  
 311 buffer gas pressure on the sideband cooling frequency  $\omega_{cool}$   
 312 were studied. Ion clouds were prepared as described in Sec.  
 313 3.2 and ejected through the 2 mm diaphragm, with opti-  
 314 mal cooling and centering resulting in greater intensities  
 315 recorded on the diagnostic MCP.

316 Figure 5 shows a 2D scan where the number of ions  
 317 in the cloud (space-charge represented by the beam gate  
 318 length) and the excitation frequency  $\omega_{rf}$  were varied, keep-  
 319 ing all other parameters constant. It can be seen that  
 320 for increasing space-charge conditions, i.e. longer beam  
 321 gate, the  $\omega_{cool}$  peak is shifted to higher frequencies. The  
 322 full-width at half-maximum (FWHM) of the peak also in-  
 323 creases, limiting the potential for mass-selective operation.

324 Figure 6 shows two series of measurements at differ-  
 325 ent buffer gas pressures. The cyclotron resonance peak  
 326 position and FWHM were measured for each, in depen-  
 327 dence with the ion number. The preparation scheme con-  
 328 sisted of 200 ms buffer gas cooling without excitations fol-  
 329 lowed by 80 ms of quadrupolar RF cooling with 3 V am-  
 330 plitude. The buffer gas pressure, as measured with the  
 331 gauge outside the traps, differed by a factor of four be-  
 332 tween the different measurements ( $p_{gauge,low} = 0.8 \times 10^{-2}$   
 333 mbar,  $p_{gauge,high} = 3.2 \times 10^{-2}$  mbar). In comparison with  
 334 the estimation from Section 5.3, the pressures used here  
 335 were lower and higher, respectively, than the calibration  
 336 point. However, the exact pressure in the cooler trap  $p_{CT}$   
 337 is difficult to estimate accurately, since its dependence on  
 338  $p_{gauge}$  is not known. With other experimental conditions  
 339 unchanged, increased buffer gas pressure causes the reso-  
 340 nance peak position to shift and FWHM to increase by a  
 341 few hundred Hz in the high buffer gas case. Thus, while

improving the cooling speed via collisions, too high buffer  
 gas pressure hampers efficient centering and possible mass  
 selective operation of the trap through resonance broad-  
 ening. Peak positions and FWHMs are found to shift  
 to higher values linearly with the number of ions, hav-  
 ing roughly the same respective slopes for both buffer gas  
 pressures.

Results shown here are only a subset of all results ob-  
 tained in this experimental campaign. In others, different  
 cooling and excitation schemes were used. The buffer gas  
 cooling time was varied between 100 ms and 200 ms, and  
 the excitation time in the 20 to 120 ms range, while  $p_{gauge}$   
 was typically varied in the range given above. For all ex-  
 perimental conditions, the resonances were qualitatively  
 similar to Fig. 6, i.e. there was a single Gaussian shaped  
 resonance peak with properties consistently following the  
 same trends with variable number of ions and buffer gas  
 pressure. This consistency and reproducibility allowed us  
 to compare the ion cloud behavior shown here to simu-  
 lations, with the goal of optimizing operational trap pa-  
 rameters, benchmarking the Simbuca simulation software  
 and providing insight into experimentally unavailable ion  
 cloud properties (see Sec. 5).

#### 4.3. Effects of space-charge on the magnetron motion

In a perfectly cylindrical Penning trap with a quadrupo-  
 lar electrostatic potential, a centrally injected ion cloud (or  
 one recentered by excitation) remains centered while the  
 ions in it perform a magnetron motion around the trap's  
 geometrical center. However, if the electrostatic field con-  
 tains asymmetrical components, or if the geometric and

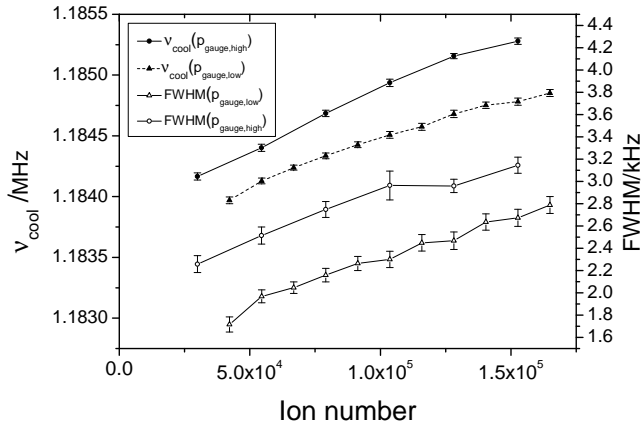


Figure 6: Cyclotron frequency  $\nu_{cool} = \omega_{cool}/2\pi$  and FWHM dependence on the number of ions and buffer gas conditions. Results are shown for two buffer gas pressures, i.e.  $p_{gauge,low} = 0.8 \times 10^{-2}$  mbar and  $p_{gauge,high} = 3.2 \times 10^{-2}$  mbar, measured outside the traps. The measurement sequence consisted of 200 ms cooling w/o excitations, 80 ms cooling and centering with quadrupolar excitation at 3 V, and ejection. The buffer gas pressure ( $p_{gauge}$ ) was kept constant for each of the two measurements.

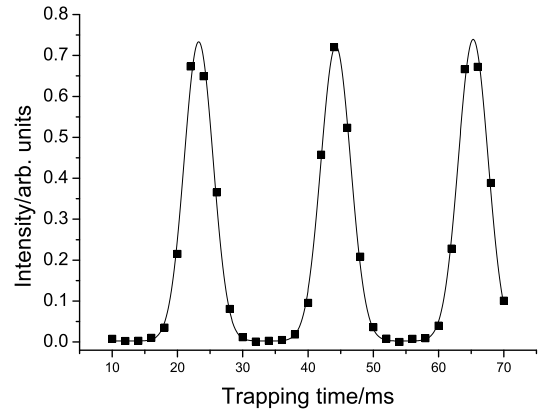


Figure 7: Ion intensity measured after ejection of the ion cloud through the diaphragm. Because of the eccentricity of the magnetron motion, only certain phases result in full transmission through the diaphragm. A Gaussian function is fitted to each peak.

magnetic field axes are not aligned, the center of the ion cloud will rotate around a point off the trap center at the magnetron frequency. This behavior was observed in the WITCH traps only for very low trap depths ( $\sim 1$  V).

In this case, an eccentric motion of the ion cloud in a shallow trap typically has a larger radius than the diaphragm situated between the CT and DT. Depending on the phase of the motion, this can result in the diaphragm blocking the ions upon ejection. This then causes a periodic dependence of ion intensity on trapping time, as shown in Fig. 7, with the difference between the peak central values corresponding to the magnetron motion period. This effect was further confirmed by ejecting the ion cloud from the traps onto a position sensitive MCP at different phases of the magnetron motion. From the radius of the motion projected on the detector, using ion tracking simulation software SimWITCH [33], it was found that the radius of the ion cloud motion around the trap center ranges from 1-4 mm. This is still too far from the trap walls (electrodes have a diameter of 40 mm) to induce image charges large enough to significantly modify the magnetron frequency [24]. In the first approximation, the magnetron frequency of a single ion in the trap is given by Eq. (2). However, in high space-charge conditions, additional radial electric field will shift this frequency to higher values, given by Eq. (10).

The effect of the eccentric motion of the ion cloud is found to be more pronounced for lower trapping potentials and disappears for higher ones ( $\sim 15$  V), since in the latter case the ion cloud is much more compact, resulting in larger numbers of ions successfully passing the diaphragm. Depending on the orientation of the crystal lattice at the

surface, electrodes can have different contact potentials, i.e. a gold plated ring electrode, such as installed in both the CT and DT, can produce a potential difference of up to  $\sim 0.4$  V [34] between its segments, causing a shift of the electrostatic trap center with respect to its geometric center. Together with a misalignment of the magnetic and electric fields, this effect was identified as a possible cause for the observed motion. A confirmation in the form of a direct measurement of the contact potential or the field misalignment is not available at this time. However, since the intensity of the radioactive source (ion cloud) is effectively modulated at the magnetron frequency as shown on Fig. 7, the characterization of  $\omega_-$  and its space-charge dependence is essential for the analysis of the WITCH experiment online data.

Since the WITCH experiment, unlike other high space-charge traps, benefits from a low trapping potential to reduce other systematic effects [35], the eccentricity of the magnetron motion presents a significant systematic effect [36], introducing an oscillatory effect superposed on the retardation spectrum data. Furthermore, since each radioactive ion trap load varies due to target conditions and in-trap decay, any dependence of the magnetron frequency on the number of ions has to be characterized and taken into account during data analysis. This effect was experimentally studied for different values of the trapping potential ranging from 0.5 V to 2 V and different amounts of charge in the trap (Fig. 8). It was found that the magnetron frequency increases linearly with the number of ions in the trap. Equation 10 implies  $\omega_- \propto \rho$  to first order, supposing that  $\rho$  is uniform. Since  $\rho$  is not experimentally available, it was simulated for the relevant space-charge range and other trap parameters matching the  $\omega_-$  measurement. It was found that  $\rho$  varies significantly within the cloud, being highest in the center and very low at outer

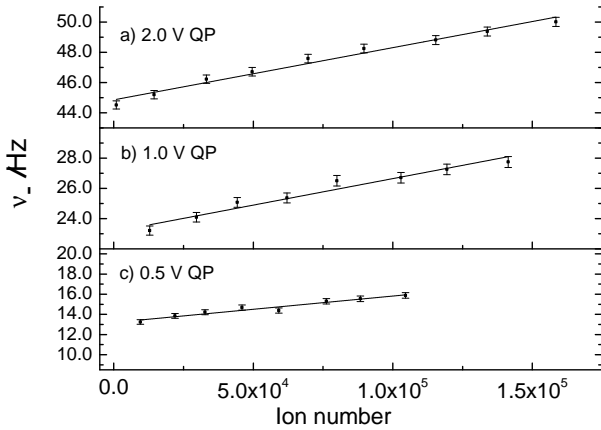


Figure 8: Dependence of the experimental magnetron frequency,  $\omega_-$ , on the number of ions for different quadrupolar trapping potential: a) 2.0 V, b) 1.0 V, c) 0.5 V.

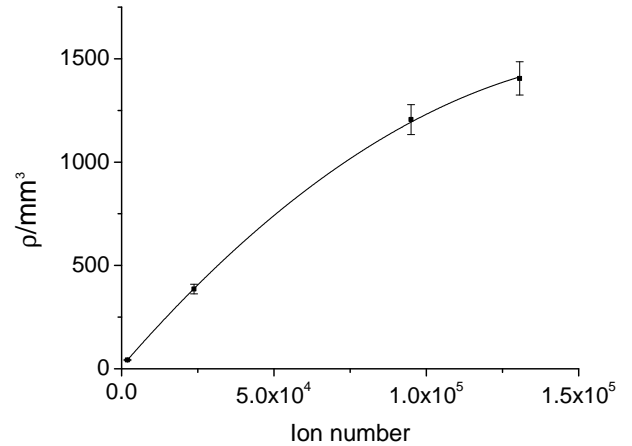


Figure 9: Simulated average density of the ion cloud for different space-charge conditions. The density dependence is almost linear for ion numbers in the selected  $10^4 - 10^5$  range. The volume of the cloud is defined as the volume containing 95% of all ions.

radii. An average  $\rho$  value was therefore calculated using the volume containing 95% of the ions. Its dependence on ion number was found to be approximately linear with a very small quadratic component, in the  $10^4 - 10^5$  range (Fig. 9). Although the simulation confirms  $\rho$  is not uniform as is assumed in the theoretical calculation of the  $\omega_-$  shift, the observed  $\omega_-$  shift is still linear with ion number, suggesting that the exact shape of  $\rho(r)$  does not have large influence on the  $\omega_-$  space-charge shift.

## 5. Simulations

Generally, the number of numerical operations needed for a Coulomb interaction simulation scales with  $\mathcal{O}(N^2)$ , where  $N$  is the number of particles, but approximate methods such as the Barnes-Hut tree [37] and fast multipole method [38] reduce this to  $\mathcal{O}(N \log N)$  and  $\mathcal{O}(N)$ , respectively. Recently, a novel *ab initio* method for N-body gravitational interaction simulations using GPUs was developed [39] and implemented in Simbuca [13], a software package for simulation of trapped ion cloud dynamics. Simbuca implements the  $K_0$  realistic buffer gas collision model [40] and dipolar, quadrupolar, octupolar and rotating wall excitations, together with customized electro- and magnetostatic field maps. The fifth-order Dormand-Prince [41] method with adaptive time step was used as integrator. In the following, Simbuca simulations of the effect of space-charge on the cyclotron resonance frequency and FWHM will be presented and compared with experimental data.

### 5.1. Setup of the simulations

The effect of space-charge on the cyclotron resonance frequency, i.e. the frequency  $\omega_{cool} = 2\pi\nu_{cool}$  at which the

magnetron-cyclotron motion interconversion via quadrupolar excitation achieves maximal effectiveness, was investigated using the Simbuca simulation software. Simulation parameters were selected to reproduce the experimental conditions described in Sec. 4.2. The magnetic field map was obtained from the manufacturer (Oxford Instruments), and the electrostatic field of the cylindrical electrode stack calculated using a COMSOL [42] model matching the trap geometry laid out in Section 3.1. The asymmetry of the CT potential described in Sec. 4.3 is not accounted for by the simulations, but does not play a role in the  $\nu_{cool}$  scans presented here, as it does not cause a measurable effect for the high end cap potentials of  $\sim 15$  V used in these measurements. Ion clouds of 500-2000 ions with their charge scaled to simulate space-charge conditions corresponding to clouds of  $10^3 - 2 \times 10^5$  ions were simulated (the validity of this approach is shown in Sec. 5.2).

The ions are created in the center of the trap within a prolate spheroid with a radius of 1-2 mm and major axis of 10-20 mm and are given an initial kinetic energy (KE), Gaussian distributed and centered around 50 eV. Furthermore, it was found that the initial KE has no influence on the cooling rate of the ion cloud, i.e. the average KE decays exponentially with a time constant determined only by the intrinsic buffer gas parameter  $\delta$ , in agreement with buffer gas cooling theory (Eq. (8)).

### 5.2. Consistency of the Coulomb scaling

Implementation on a GPU allows for a large degree of parallelization in  $N$ -body interaction calculations and results in simulation times reduced by orders of magnitude compared to a modern CPU. While this provides a large improvement in computational speed, simulating ion



clouds with  $N$  larger than a few thousand is still impractical with modern GPUs, and a scaled Coulomb method is therefore employed here. This approximation was verified to give accurate results up to a scaling factor of about 100.

The simulations were set up so as to cross-check increasing scaling factors (SF) ranging from 1 to 1024, for pairs of ion clouds scaled to the same total charge. For example, a cloud of 1000 ions scaled by a factor of 1 and a cloud of 500 ions scaled by a factor of 2 were compared (see Table 1). They were subjected to cooling and centering schemes matching the ones used in other simulations presented here, i.e. consisting of 200 ms cooling from a high (10 - 50 eV) kinetic energy, 80 ms of centering with quadrupolar excitations and 10 ms of relaxation. The time evolution of macroscopic parameters sensitive to space-charge effects, such as the average ion radius  $R$ , the average axial displacement  $Z$ , and the per-ion energy  $E$ , was compared for complementary pairs of ion clouds. As shown in Table 1 and Fig. 10, the average radial position of the ions in the cloud is typically different by a few percent only (i.e. well within error bars) for ion cloud pairs up to scaling factors (64,128), but diverging significantly for (128,256) and higher SFs. It is notable that the final  $R$  of all ion clouds of  $10^3 - 1.28 \times 10^5$  ions is approximately equal, indicating that the centering efficiency is still not significantly hampered by the space-charge in this range. However, the axial displacement  $Z$  increases significantly for higher factors, due to more ions being “pushed out” axially when the cloud is “squeezed” radially by the excitation field forces. The average per-ion energy  $E$  at  $t=290$  ms also agrees well for ion clouds scaled below factor 128. However, there is a trend of decreasing  $E$  with increasing total space-charge (see Fig. 10). The largest component of  $E$  stems from the residual energy of the quadrupolar excitations, indicating that ion clouds with lower total space-charge absorb more energy from the exciting field. This is most probably due to stronger shielding of the field by outer ions in cases of higher Coulomb scaling.

### 5.3. Buffer gas pressure estimation

The effect of buffer gas atoms on trapped ions with significantly higher energy than the buffer gas itself can be adequately modelled by viscous damping (Eq. (5)). This force will cause an exponential time-dependence of the ion velocity:

$$v(t) = v(0)e^{-\delta t/m}, \quad (11)$$

where  $\delta$  is given by Eq. (6). The time dependence of the total ion energy can then be written as:

$$E_{TOT} = E_{Pot} + E_{kin}(0)e^{-2\delta t_{cool}/m} + E_{kin}(t_{cool} \rightarrow \infty), \quad (12)$$

where  $E_{kin}(0)$  represents the initial kinetic energy of the ions,  $E_{kin}(t_{cool} \rightarrow \infty)$  the lower energy limit of the buffer

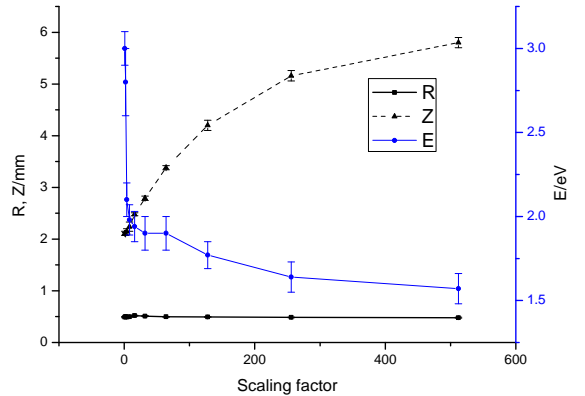


Figure 10: Dependence of the average radius  $R$ , average axial displacement  $Z$  (left axis) and average energy per ion  $E$  (right axis) on the scaling factor for clouds of  $10^3$  ions.

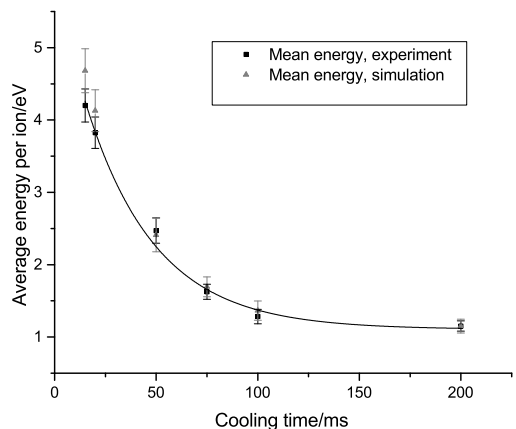


Figure 11: Dependence of the mean axial energy per ion after ejection on the cooling time. Experimental data points (black) are shown together with results from simulations (grey). The line represents an exponential decay function fitted to the experimental data.

Ions	$SF$	$R/\text{mm}$	$Z/\text{mm}$	$E/\text{eV}$
1000	1	$0.49\pm 0.013$	$2.11\pm 0.04$	$3.0\pm 0.14$
500	2	$0.500\pm 0.009$	$2.12\pm 0.05$	$3.25\pm 0.16$
1000	2	$0.503\pm 0.014$	$2.10\pm 0.03$	$2.84\pm 0.19$
500	4	$0.503\pm 0.008$	$2.16\pm 0.08$	$2.81\pm 0.12$
1000	4	$0.494\pm 0.017$	$2.15\pm 0.05$	$2.15\pm 0.12$
500	8	$0.507\pm 0.009$	$2.07\pm 0.08$	$2.29\pm 0.11$
1000	8	$0.498\pm 0.008$	$2.24\pm 0.09$	$1.98\pm 0.09$
500	16	$0.501\pm 0.008$	$2.22\pm 0.03$	$1.94\pm 0.10$
1000	16	$0.516\pm 0.012$	$2.48\pm 0.03$	$1.94\pm 0.09$
500	32	$0.501\pm 0.008$	$2.22\pm 0.03$	$1.94\pm 0.10$
1000	32	$0.511\pm 0.008$	$2.79\pm 0.04$	$1.92\pm 0.10$
500	64	$0.500\pm 0.006$	$3.07\pm 0.08$	$1.94\pm 0.08$
1000	64	$0.497\pm 0.005$	$3.38\pm 0.04$	$1.86\pm 0.09$
500	128	$0.498\pm 0.013$	$3.67\pm 0.08$	$1.84\pm 0.09$
1000	128	$0.494\pm 0.005$	$4.25\pm 0.05$	$1.77\pm 0.08$
500	256	$0.473\pm 0.007$	$4.74\pm 0.11$	$1.56\pm 0.09$
1000	256	$0.485\pm 0.005$	$5.16\pm 0.08$	$1.64\pm 0.09$
500	512	$0.433\pm 0.007$	$5.19\pm 0.23$	$1.43\pm 0.09$
1000	512	$0.479\pm 0.012$	$5.81\pm 0.10$	$1.57\pm 0.09$
500	1024	$0.424\pm 0.006$	$5.76\pm 0.23$	$1.35\pm 0.06$

Table 1: Number of simulated ions and their Coulomb scaling factor ( $SF$ ), average radius ( $R$ ), average axial displacement ( $Z$ ) and average energy per ion ( $E$ ) at  $t=290$  ms. The error bars are the standard deviations of several values of  $R$ ,  $Z$  and  $E$  around  $t=290$  ms, the end of the cycle.

gas cooling, i.e. thermalization with the buffer gas, and  $E_{Pot}$  the potential energy.

For different cooling times ranging from 20 to 200 ms the ion energy was measured by releasing the cloud from the CT into the DT, where a retardation barrier was varied from 0 to 10 V while other parameters were kept constant. In this way, the axial energy of the ion cloud was obtained as a function of the cooling time. This exponentially decaying cooling curve is shown in Fig. 11. It should be noted that this curve does not reach thermal equilibrium at a kinetic energy of about 0.025 eV. This is because a constant offset is produced when the quadrupolar trapping potential is switched to release the ions (see Fig. 3 d), resulting in a total energy upon ejection of about 1.45 eV. The simulation was then fitted to the experimental cooling curves with buffer gas as the free parameter, resulting in a  $p_{CT}$  estimate. The small discrepancies between experimental and simulated data in Fig. 11. seen for the earliest cooling times are due to small differences in the not precisely known initial conditions for the real and simulated ion clouds. The buffer gas pressure was found to be  $p_{CT} = 2.5(9) \times 10^{-5}$  mbar when the pressure at the gauge position was  $p_{gauge} = 2 \times 10^{-2}$  mbar.

#### 5.4. Simulation of sideband cooling resonances

The ion cloud was subjected to the same manipulations as in the corresponding experimental study: energetic ions were contained by a high end cap potential ( $\sim 150$  V),

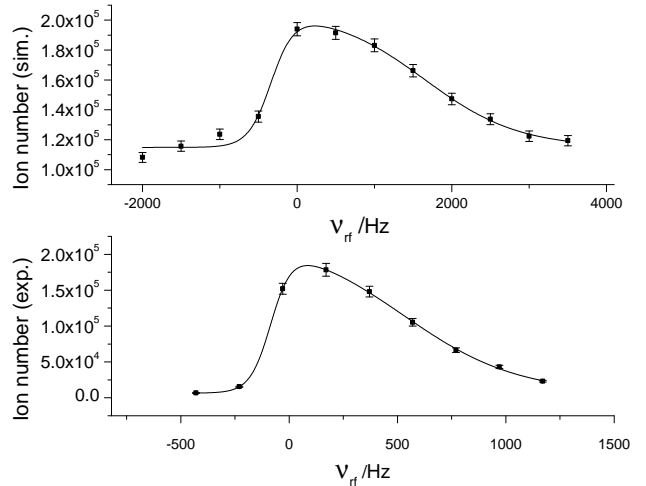


Figure 12: Experimental scan of the cooling frequency  $\nu_{cool}$  shift (bottom) and a simulated scan with matching parameters (top). Zero of the horizontal axis corresponds to  $\nu_c$ . The empirical fitted function is an asymmetric double sigmoid.

then cooled into a nested central quadrupolar potential well ( $\sim 15$  V) for up to 200 ms without excitations, and finally subjected to quadrupolar excitations for 80 ms at 3 V amplitude. The frequency was scanned over a few kHz from -2 kHz to 3.5 kHz around  $\nu_c$  to determine the optimal cooling and centering frequency  $\nu_{cool}$ , i.e. the central value and FWHM of the resonance curve. Figure 12 (top) shows such a scan of  $\nu_{cool}$  for 2000 ions scaled with a factor of 100, corresponding to a cloud of  $2 \times 10^5$  ions in a buffer gas with  $p_{CT} = 2.5 \times 10^{-5}$  mbar (see Sec. 5.2). A period of 100 ms of buffer gas cooling without excitations is followed by 120 ms of cooling and centering via quadrupolar excitations with 3 V amplitude. The ions were considered to be centered if the radius of their motion was smaller than the diaphragm radius. Figure 12 (bottom) shows an experimental scan with matching parameters. Both resonances are asymmetric in shape, with the number of ions rising sharply at the lower end of  $\nu_{rf}$  and decreasing more gradually at the high-frequency side. This behavior is in agreement with results of the mean-field model of the space-charge frequency shifts from [43]. The optimal cooling frequency,  $\nu_{cool}$ , is accurately reproduced by simulations. However, the FWHMs of the experimental resonance peaks are reproduced less well and there is an offset of the baseline due to incomplete knowledge of the initial position of the ion cloud in the trap.

Figure 13 compares measured and simulated relative shifts of the optimal cooling frequency  $\nu_{cool}$  for experimental data and simulated ion clouds in identical conditions as described previously. The offset corresponding to zero ions was extrapolated and used as reference for experimental and simulation data. The simulation is in good agreement with experimental data, especially in view of the uncertainties in the estimation of  $p_{CT}$  and in our understanding

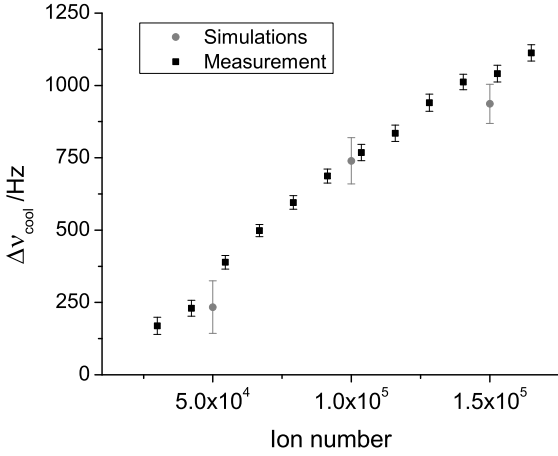


Figure 13: Comparison of measured and simulated relative shifts of the cooling frequency  $\nu_{cool}$ .

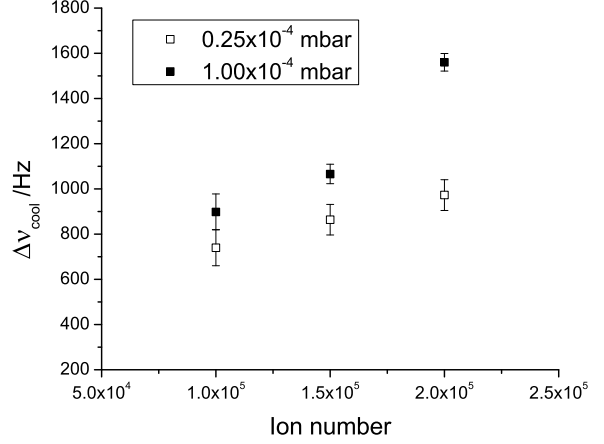


Figure 14: Comparison of simulated  $\nu_{cool}$  shifts for different buffer gas pressures in the CT.

of the initial conditions of the ion cloud.

Figure 14 shows a simulation of the difference in frequency shifts  $\Delta\nu_{cool}$  between  $p_{CT} = 2.5 \times 10^{-5}$  mbar and  $p_{CT} = 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$  mbar, with all other simulation parameters kept constant. The  $\nu_{cool}$  resonance frequency of the ion cloud increases for higher values of  $p_{CT}$ , being in qualitative agreement with experimental data shown on Fig. 6. It should be noted though that quantitative comparison of data on Fig. 6 and Fig 14 is not possible, since the estimation (see Sec. 5.3) for  $p_{CT}$  is not available in these cases.

Figures 15 and 16 show the simulated dependence of the  $\nu_{cool}$  peak FWHM on  $p_{CT}$  and on space-charge, i.e. the number of ions, respectively. The FWHM is increasing with  $p_{CT}$ , in qualitative agreement with experimental data. However, an accurate quantitative comparison of the effect of the space-charge and  $p_{CT}$  on the FWHM is limited by the precision and availability of the experimental value for  $p_{CT}$ . Furthermore, while Coulomb scaling can consistently reproduce the space-charge conditions of a large ion cloud ( $\sim 2 \times 10^5$  ions), the cumulative interaction with the Helium buffer gas in the case presented here amounts only to a cloud of  $2 \times 10^3$  ions. This mismatch of simulated and experimental conditions is identified as a possible reason for the discrepancy between the simulated and experimental FWHM that can be seen in Fig. 16. The simulation is seen to significantly underestimate the FWHM for the experimentally estimated  $p_{CT} = 2.5 \times 10^{-5}$  mbar. For the higher simulated pressure of  $1 \times 10^{-4}$  mbar the FWHM behavior is similar to the case of lower space charge values, although sharply rising at about  $2 \times 10^5$  ions. Since the simulation of  $\sim 10^5$  ions without Coulomb scaling with current GPU technology is not feasible because of computation time limitations, these effects will require improvements in simulation speed for accurate predictions under the given experimental conditions.

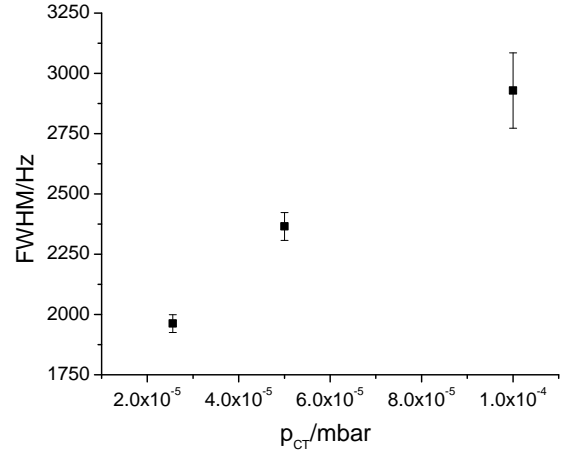


Figure 15: Dependence of the FWHM of the simulated  $\nu_{cool}$  on  $p_{CT}$  for a cloud of  $10^5$  ions.

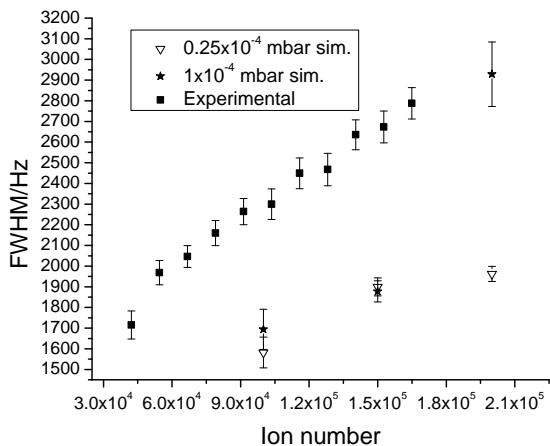


Figure 16: Comparison of simulated  $\nu_{cool}$  FWHM dependence on the amount of ions for different buffer gas pressures with experimental data.

## 6. Summary and outlook

Systematic effects related to space-charge present challenges for successful operation of the WITCH system as well as other existing or planned Penning traps. They have been investigated both experimentally and numerically in this work.

The buffer gas pressure inside the Cooler Trap was estimated through measurement of the ion cloud cooling rate and comparison with simulations. Since pressure gauges cannot be operated in the close vicinity of a Penning trap this approach provides a useful, albeit less accurate alternative.

Off-center magnetron motion of the entire ion cloud was observed experimentally in the WITCH Penning traps. It was found to be of significant importance as a systematic effect in the WITCH on-line experimental data. Its eigenfrequency was studied under different space-charge conditions. It was found that it rises proportionally with the number of ions, as is expected from theory. This result provides an essential correction to the on-line retardation spectrum data of WITCH [44].

The influence of space-charge on the  $\nu_-$  eigenfrequency and  $\nu_{cool}$  has been investigated.  $^{39}\text{K}^+$  ions were subjected to the buffer gas cooling technique and its effectiveness in different space-charge and buffer gas conditions was measured. The properties of the  $\nu_{cool}$  peaks i.e. their center frequency and FWHM in specific experimental conditions are of special interest for improving the understanding of high-capacity Penning traps and their operation as mass separators. The Simbuca software for *ab initio* simulation of ion cloud dynamics in particle traps was benchmarked against experimental results, successfully simulating complex dynamics of a large ion cloud in a buffer-gas filled Penning trap modelled using realistic field maps. Shifts

of  $\nu_{cool}$  peaks under increasing space-charge were accurately reproduced for different experimental conditions, while other effects such as the influence of space-charge and of  $p_{CT}$  on the FWHM were reproduced qualitatively.

These results establish Simbuca as a promising tool for Penning trap optimization and design. The study presented here, i.e. investigating the effect of space-charge on ion dynamics, further contributes toward the effort to understand fundamental properties of Penning traps and to increase their application domain.

## 7. Acknowledgments

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