

Science goals in laser-particle interactions

B. King

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RAL Particle Physics Department Seminar

15-07-26

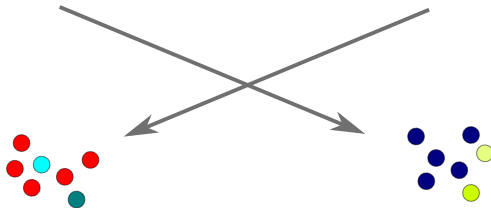
- Summary of some key strong-field QED concepts
- Charge-field coupling in intense electromagnetic backgrounds
- Some example Science Goals and experimental set-ups
- Radiation reaction

Strong-field QED in laser backgrounds

We start with a well-defined 'in' state, $|\text{in}\rangle$

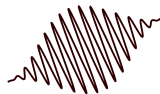


- We measure a well-defined 'out' state, $\langle \text{out} |$

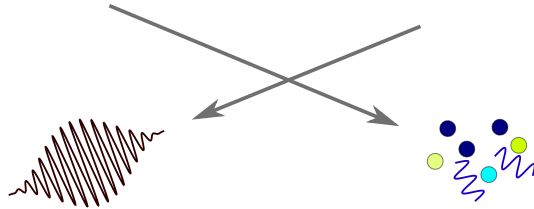


- The probability is then $\sim |\langle \text{out} | \text{in} \rangle|^2$ or $|S_{fi}|^2$.

- We start a well-defined 'in' state, $|\text{in}\rangle$ which includes a laser pulse



- We measure a well-defined 'out' state, $\langle \text{out} |$



- The probability is then $\sim |\langle \text{out} | \text{in} \rangle|^2$ or $|S_{fi}|^2$.

- We are interested in describing QED in **coherent** EM fields ('**intense electromagnetic fields**');

Examples:

- Slowly-varying magnetic fields
- Inter-crystalline fields
- Beam-beam scattering
- Laser pulses (optical, XFEL, etc.)

→ Coherence implies: $\langle E \rangle \neq 0$

Counter-examples:

- Blackbody radiation
- Bremsstrahlung
- Radiating gas jets

→ Incoherence implies: $\langle E \rangle \approx 0$

- From QED fundamental parameters:
 - Electron mass: m
 - Positron charge: $e > 0$
 - Speed of light: c
 - Reduced Planck's constant: $\hbar$

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- QED field strength scale / 'Schwinger' limit / 'Critical field' /... is given by:

$$E_{\text{qed}} = \frac{m^2 c^3}{e \hbar}$$

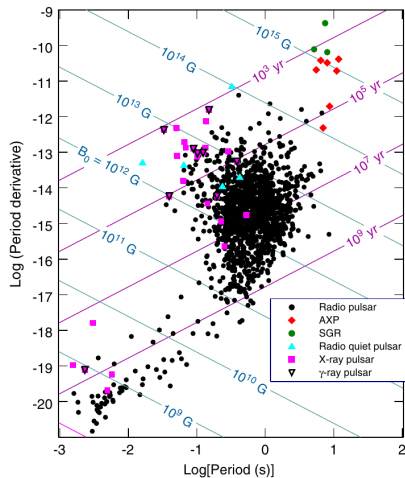
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- Pair creation scale:

$$\underbrace{e E_{\text{qed}} \lambda}_{\text{work done by field over electron wavelength}} = \underbrace{mc^2}_{\text{rest energy of electron}}$$

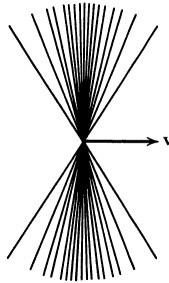
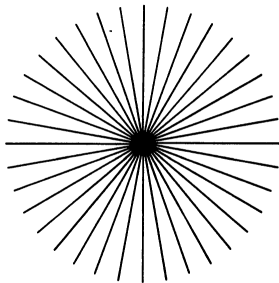
QED Field Scale (Magnetic): $B_{\text{qed}} \approx 4.4 \times 10^{13} \text{ G}$



A. Harding, D. Lai, Rep. Prog. Phys. **69** 2631 (2006) [arXiv:astro-ph/0606674]

- Cannot reach E_{qed} in the lab, but...

...relativistic enhancement of **rest frame** field for accelerated charges: $E_{\text{r.f.}} \rightarrow \gamma(1 + \beta)E_{\text{lab}}$:



J. D. Jackson, *Classical Electrodynamics* 3rd. Edition

- Strong-field parameter, χ :

$$\chi = \frac{1}{E_{\text{qed}}} \frac{1}{mc^2} \sqrt{-(p_\mu F^{\mu\nu})^2}$$

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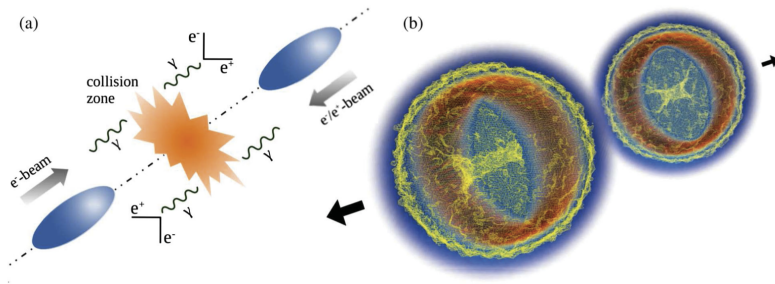
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- Strong**-field QED when $\chi \sim O(1)$.



Phys. Rev. Lett. **122**, 190404 (2019)

- Simulation of collision of two spherical 10 nm electron beams with 125 GeV energy (blue) producing photon (yellow) and probing $\chi \gtrsim 10^3$ (red).

Charge-field interaction

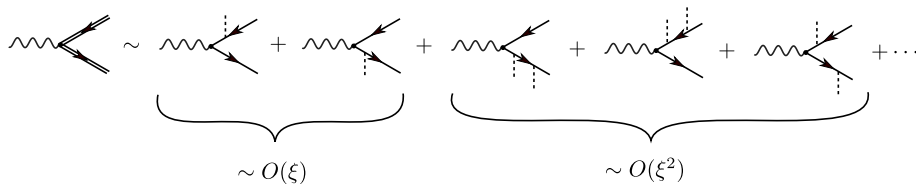
- Electromagnetic plane wave 'background': $eA^\mu = a^\mu = m \underbrace{\xi g(\varphi)}_{O(1)} \varepsilon^\mu$

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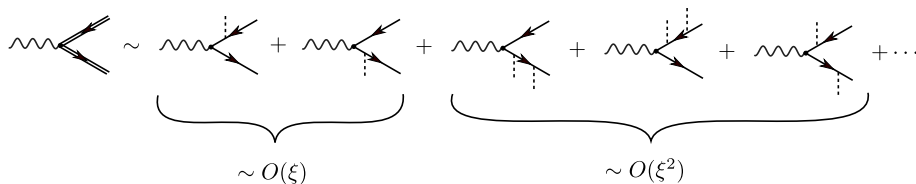
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- Example process: $\gamma \rightarrow e^+ e^-$ in

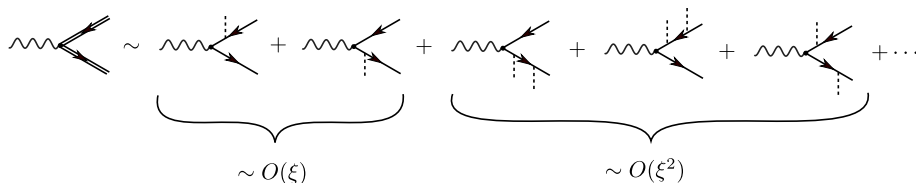


- Charge-background coupling $e \rightarrow \xi$



- **Intensity parameter** , ξ :

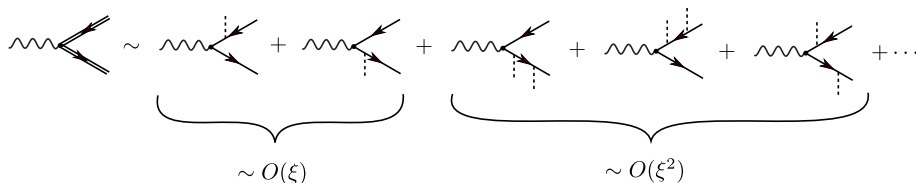
$$\xi^2 = \alpha \underbrace{4\pi \tilde{\lambda}_{\text{laser}} \tilde{\lambda}_{\text{C}}^2}_{\text{three volume}} \underbrace{n_{\text{laser}}}_{\text{'photon' number density}} \sim \alpha N_{\text{interacting 'laser photons'}}$$



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- $\xi \sim O(1)$ 'all-order' / **non-perturbativity at small coupling** c.f. gluon saturation, Bjorken- $x \rightarrow 0$



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- $\xi \sim O(1)$ 'all-order' / **non-perturbativity at small coupling** c.f. gluon saturation, Bjorken- $x \rightarrow 0$
- When $\xi \sim O(1)$, need to **resum** all order charge-background interaction.

- Split potential into 'background' and 'radiation':

$$\hat{A} \rightarrow \underbrace{A}_{\text{classical}} + \underbrace{A}_{\text{radiation}}$$

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$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{QED}} = \underbrace{-\frac{1}{4}F_{\mu\nu}F^{\mu\nu} + \bar{\psi}(i\cancel{\partial} - m)\psi}_{\text{‘unperturbed’}} \underbrace{-e\bar{\psi}(\mathcal{A} + A)\psi}_{\text{interaction}},$$

Rearrange:

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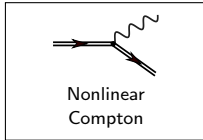
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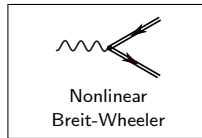
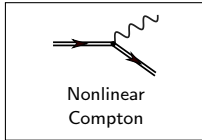
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$D_\mu = \partial_\mu + ie\mathcal{A}_\mu$, covariant derivative.

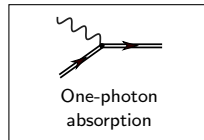
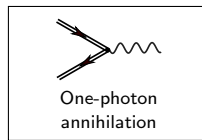
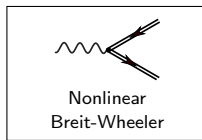
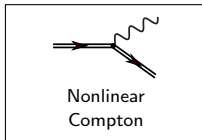
- Leading tree-level processes:



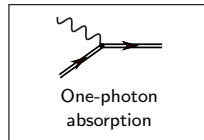
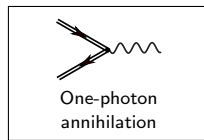
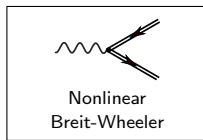
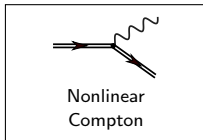
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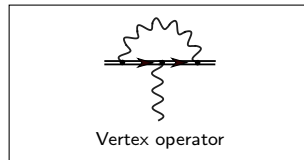
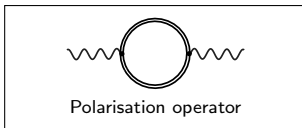
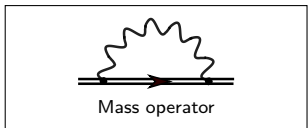
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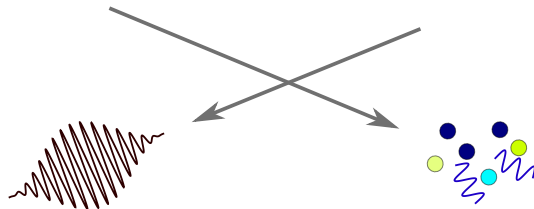
- Leading tree-level processes:



- Leading loop processes:



Science Goals

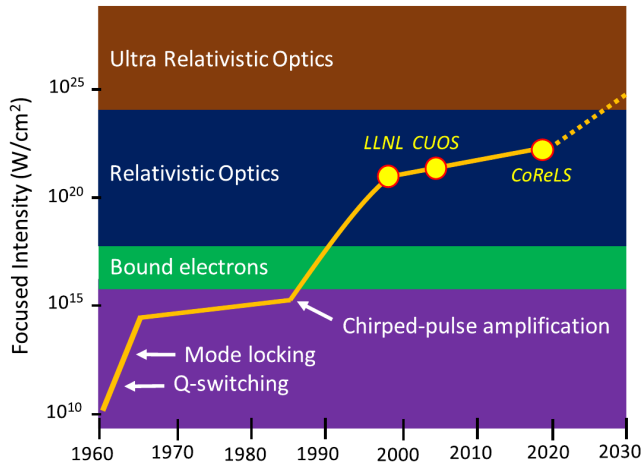


Strong EM fields:

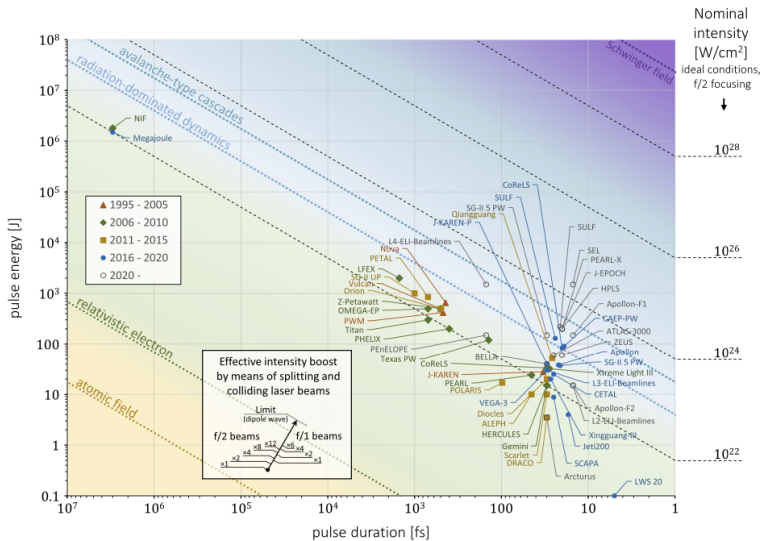
- High Power Laser Facilities (Gemini, EPAC, Vulcan 20-20, ELI, ZEUS, SEL, ...)
- XFELs (EU.XFEL, LCLS, SEL, ...)
- Oriented crystals (NA63)
- High-Z nuclei Coulomb fields
- Beamsstrahlung
- AXPs, Magnetars, ...

Probe beams:

- Laser wakefield accelerated electrons (e.g. gas jets)
- Linac electrons
- Bremsstrahlung photons
- Inverse Compton Scattered source
- Crystal radiators
- Thermal emission

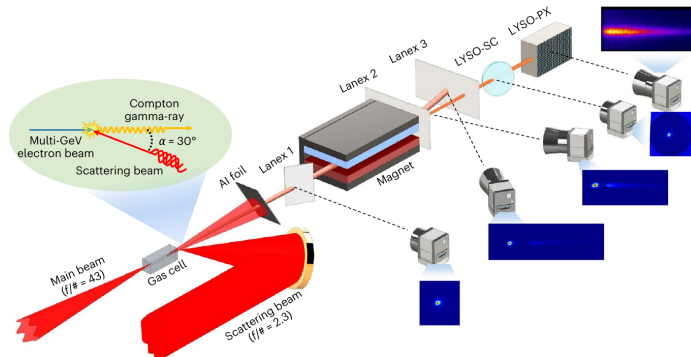


AAPPS Bull. 31, 4 (2021)



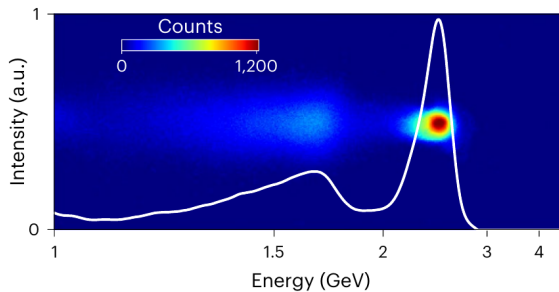
A. Gonoskov et al. Rev. Mod. Phys. 94, 045001 (2022)

- “All-optical” example: CoReLS nonlinear Compton scattering measurement



M. Mirzaie et al. *Nature Photon.* **18**, 1212–1217 (2024)

- Example LWFA electron spectrum:

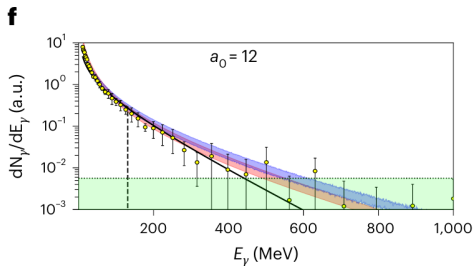
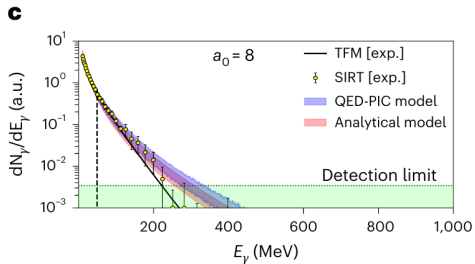


M. Mirzaie et al. *Nature Photon.* **18**, 1212–1217 (2024)

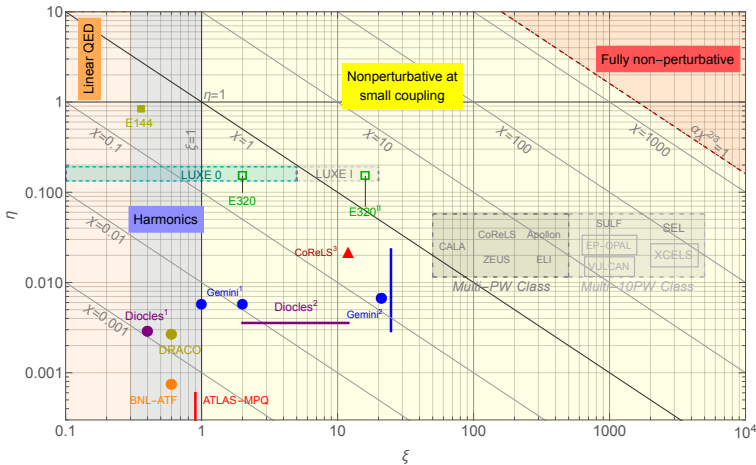
Photon spectrum:

- 1.5 GeV electrons, $\xi = 8$, $\chi \approx 0.13$

- 2.4 GeV electrons, $\xi = 12$, $\chi \approx 0.32$



M. Mirzaie et al. Nature Photon. **18**, 1212–1217 (2024)

Nonlinear Compton: $e^{\pm} \rightarrow e^{\pm} + \gamma$ 

Eur. Phys. J. Plus (2025) 140:1151
<https://doi.org/10.1140/epjp/s13360-025-07057-7>

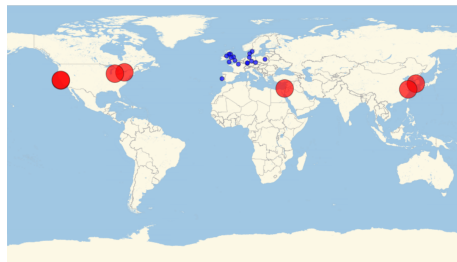
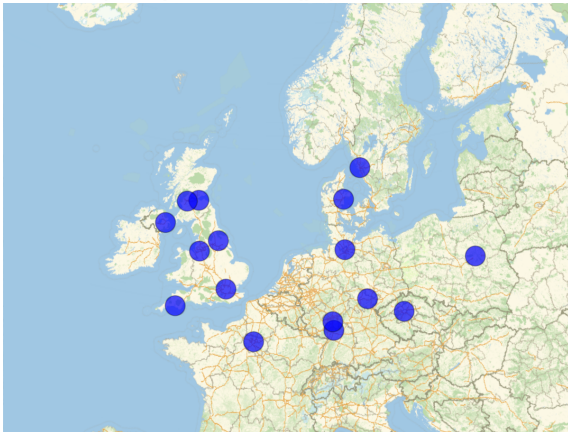
Review

THE EUROPEAN
PHYSICAL JOURNAL PLUS



Input to the European strategy for particle physics: strong-field quantum electrodynamics

G. Sarri^[14], B. King^[2], T. Blackburn^[3], A. Ilderton^[4], S. Booger^[5], S. S. Bulanov^[6], S. V. Bulanov^[7], A. Di Piazza^[8], L. J. F^[9], F. Karbstein^[10], C. H. Keitel^[11], K. Krajewska^[12], V. Malka^[13], S. P. D. Mangles^[14], F. Mathieu^[15], P. McKenna^[16], S. Meuren^[17], M. Mirzaei^[18], C. Ridgers^[19], D. Seipt^[20], A. G. R. Thomas^[21], U. Uggerhøj^[22], M. Vranic^[23], M. Wing^[24]



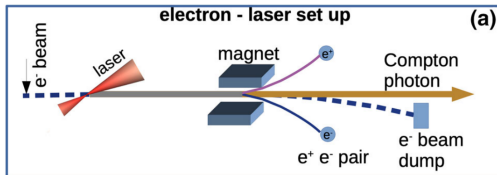


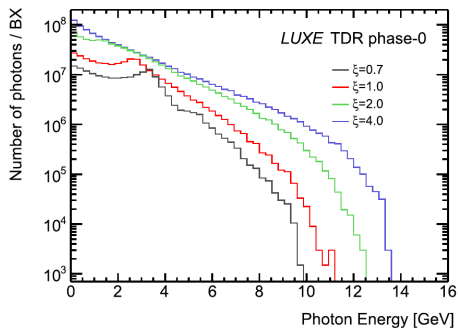
LUXE - Laser Und Xfel Experiment



$\sim O(100)$ people, 20 institutions in:
Germany, Israel, UK, Sweden, France, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain

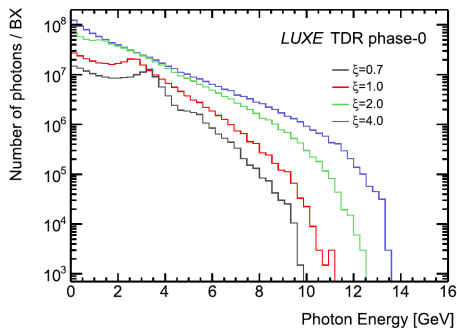
H. Abramowicz et al. Eur.Phys.J.ST **230** (2021) 11, 2445-2560, H. Abramowicz et al. Eur.Phys.J.ST **233** (2024) 10, 1709-174





- Position of harmonic edge (lightfront momentum fraction):

$$u = \frac{2\eta}{1 + \xi^2 + 2\eta}$$

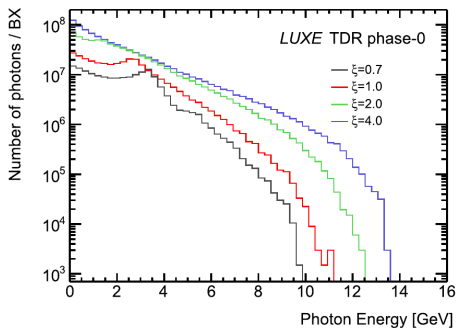


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$$u = \frac{2\eta}{1 + \xi^2 + 2\eta}$$

- Correction to 'linear' QED:

$$u \approx u^{(\text{QED})} \left[1 - \frac{\xi^2}{1 + 2\eta} + \left(\frac{\xi^2}{1 + 2\eta} \right)^2 + \dots \right]$$



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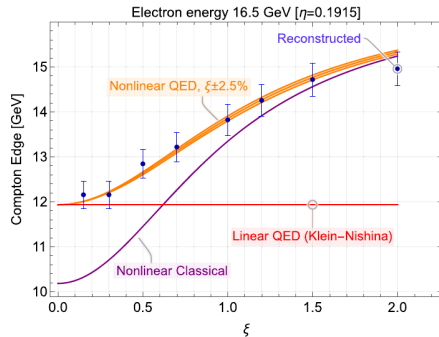
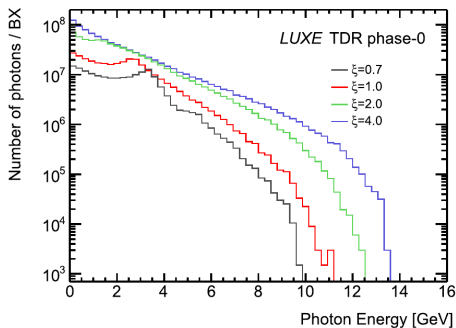
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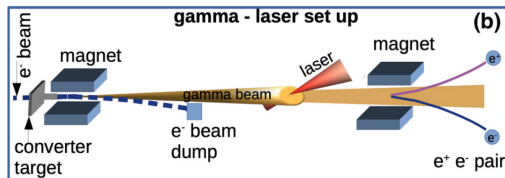
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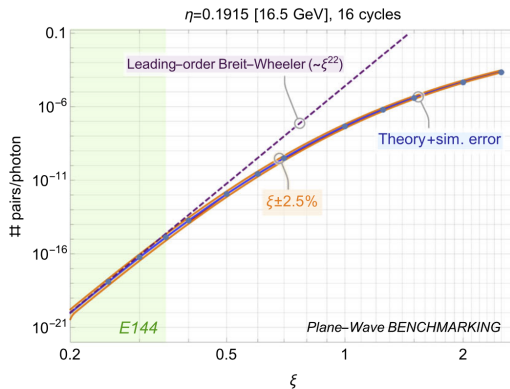
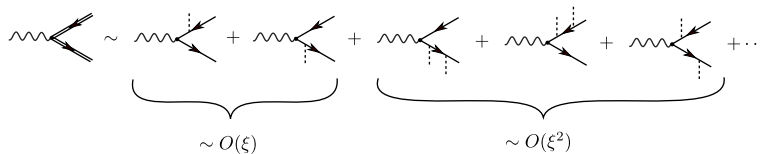
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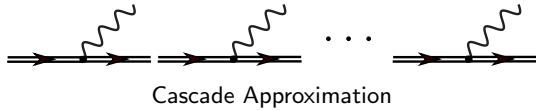
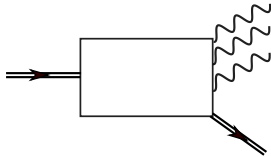


- 16.5 GeV electrons, but $\gamma + \text{laser}$ collisions also planned using:
- Bremsstrahlung photons
- Inverse Compton Scattered (ICS) photons: ~ 8.5 GeV, polarisation grade: $\lesssim 95\%$
- Polarised crystal radiator photons: ~ 12 GeV, polarisation grade: $\lesssim 80\%$

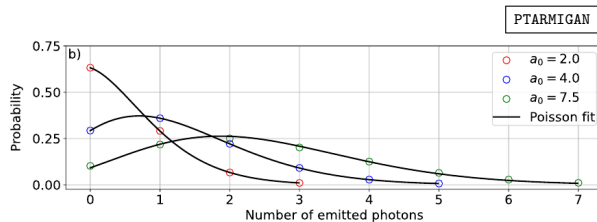


- Approximate higher-order processes by using 'rate generators' to iterate first-order processes

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- e.g. Compton showers

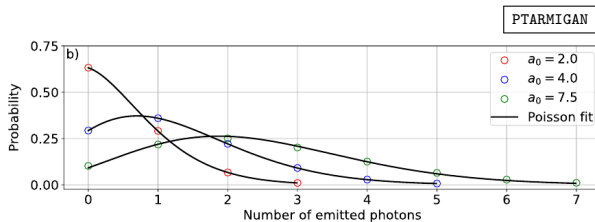


- e.g. nonlinear Compton scattering of 8 GeV electron in 30 fs pulse:



T. Blackburn et al. PRA **113**, 043109 (2026)

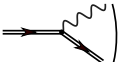
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T. Blackburn et al. PRA **113**, 043109 (2026)

- Approximately Poisson distributed, perturbative physics (truncatable)

- In a **constant crossed field** (CCF) i.e. homogeneous plane wave $\mathcal{S} = \mathcal{P} = \eta = 0$:

$$\text{As } \chi \rightarrow \infty, \quad \text{P} \left(\text{diagram} \right) \sim \alpha \chi^{2/3}$$


A. I. Nikishov, V. I. Ritus. JETP **19**, 529 (1964)

(likewise for nonlinear Breit-Wheeler).

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- In a **constant crossed field** (CCF) i.e. homogeneous plane wave $\mathcal{S} = \mathcal{P} = \eta = 0$:

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A. I. Nikishov, V. I. Ritus. JETP **19**, 529 (1964)

(likewise for nonlinear Breit-Wheeler).

- When $\alpha \chi^{2/3} \sim O(1)$ i.e. $\chi \sim O(10^3)$, perturbation series in (dressed) vertices would break down
- Strong-field QED potentially becomes **strongly-coupled**.

- Scaling extends to photon and electron propagators

			1 loop			
(1a)		$\alpha\chi^{2/3}$	[12]	(1b)		$\alpha\chi^{2/3}$ [13]
			2 loops			
(2a)		$\alpha^2\chi^{2/3}\log\chi$	[16]	(2b)		$\alpha^2\chi\log\chi$ [14,21]
				(2c)		$\alpha^2\chi^{2/3}\log\chi$ [15]
			3 loops			
(3a)		$\alpha^3\chi^{2/3}\log\chi$	[17]	(3d)		$\alpha^3\chi^{2/3}\log^2\chi$ [17]
(3b)		$\alpha^3\chi^{2/3}\log\chi$	[17]	(3e)		$\alpha^3\chi^{4/3}$ [17]
(3c)		$\alpha^3\chi\log^2\chi$	[18]	(3f)		$\alpha^3\chi\log^2\chi$ [18]
				(3g)		$\alpha^3\chi^{5/3}$ [18]

A. A. Mironov, Phys Rev. D **102**, 053005 (2020)

- Ritus-Narozhny conjecture: In CCF, $\alpha\chi^{2/3}$ is expansion parameter of strong-field QED

For a QED process with n vertices:

- Weak fields ($\xi \ll 1$):

$$P = \alpha^n [f_0 + \alpha f_1 + \dots]$$

... perturbative expansion works very well!

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- 'High χ ' regime ($\alpha\chi^{2/3} \sim O(1)$?):

$$P = \alpha^n f_n(\alpha, \xi) ?$$

Radiation Reaction

- Coupled equations for electron trajectory and radiation:

$$m\ddot{\mathbf{x}} = e [\partial(A \cdot \dot{\mathbf{x}}) - A(\partial \cdot \dot{\mathbf{x}})]$$

$$\square A = e \int \dot{\mathbf{x}}$$

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- Next order:

$$m\ddot{x}^{(1)} = \partial(A_{\text{laser}} \cdot \dot{x}^{(1)}) - A_{\text{laser}}(\partial \cdot \dot{x}^{(1)}) + \partial(A_{\gamma}^{(1)} \cdot \dot{x}^{(0)}) - A_{\gamma}^{(1)}(\partial \cdot \dot{x}^{(0)})$$

$$\square A_{\gamma}^{(2)} = \int \dot{x}^{(1)}$$

- Calculating radiation from electron (**all-orders RR**), Landau-Lifshitz equation:

$$m\ddot{x} = F_{\text{bg}} \cdot \dot{x}(\tau) + \underbrace{\frac{e^2}{6\pi} \left[\dot{F}_{\text{bg}} \cdot \dot{x} + (1 + \dot{x}\dot{x}) \cdot F_{\text{bg}} \cdot F_{\text{bg}} \cdot \dot{x} \right]}_{\text{classical RR}}$$

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- Can be solved in a plane wave background.

A. D. Piazza, Lett. Math. Phys. 83, 305 (2008)

- Ratio of scattered to incident electron energy parameter:

$$\frac{\eta'}{\eta} = \frac{1}{1 + \Delta}; \quad \Delta = \frac{2\alpha\eta}{3} \int \xi'^2(\varphi) d\varphi$$

- Quantum radiation reaction more general...

- **Quantum** radiation reaction more general...
- Classical limit ($\hbar \rightarrow 0$) of expected scattered electron momentum of:

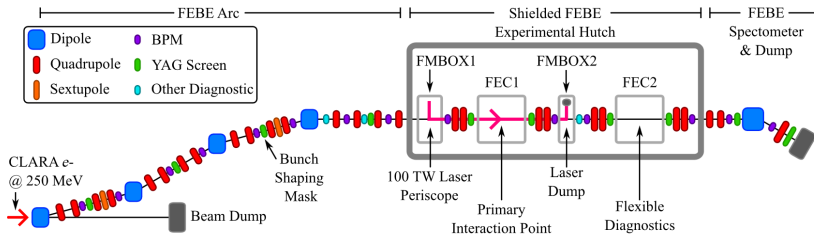
$$\left| p_\mu \xrightarrow{\text{wavy}} p'_\mu \right|^2, \quad p_\mu \xrightarrow{\text{wavy}} p'_\mu \times p'_\mu \xleftarrow{\text{wavy}} p_\mu + p_\mu \xleftarrow{\text{wavy}} p'_\mu \times p'_\mu \xrightarrow{\text{wavy}} p_\mu$$

... agrees with leading order prediction from Landau-Lifshitz equation:

$$\frac{\eta'}{\eta} \approx 1 - \Delta; \quad \Delta = \frac{2\alpha\eta}{3} \int \xi'^2(\varphi) d\varphi$$

A. Ilderton and G. Torgrimsson, Phys. Lett. B 481-486, **725** (2013)

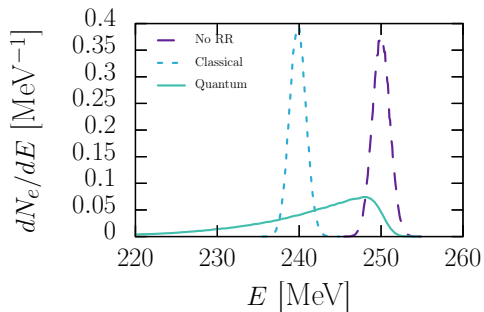
- Full Energy Beam Exploitation (FEBE) at CLARA in Daresbury



E. W. Sneddon et al. *Phys. Rev. Accel. Beams* **27**, 041602 (2024)

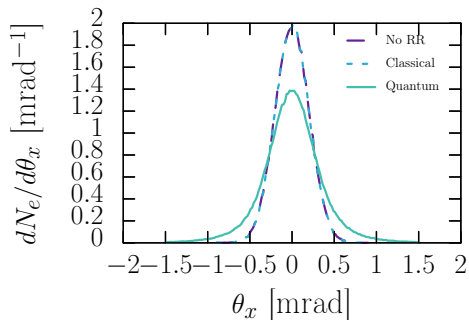
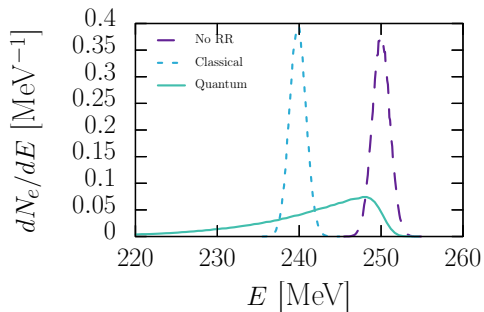
- 250 MeV electron beam, energy spread $\sim 1\%$.
- Laser intensity $\xi \sim O(10)$
- Strong-field parameter $\chi \approx 0.003$
- Radiation reaction parameter $\Delta \approx 0.05$.

- Laser: $\xi = 10, 25$ fs duration (FWHM)
- Electrons: 250 MeV, $1 \mu\text{m}$ bunch length

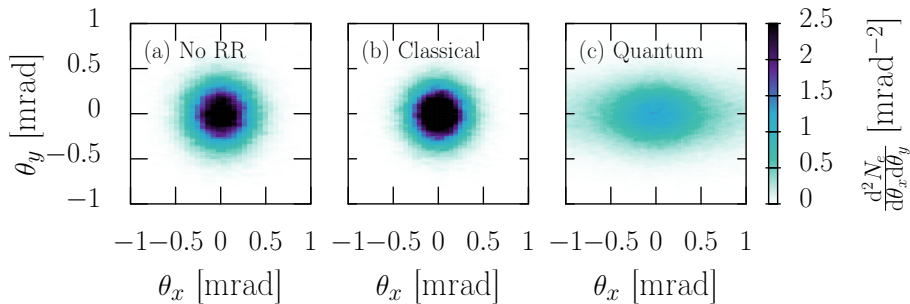


A. J. Macleod (private communication)

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- Electrons: 250 MeV, $1 \mu\text{m}$ bunch length



A. J. Macleod (private communication)



A. J. Macleod (private communication)

- Collaboration forming between particle/accelerator and laser physicists

Summary

- High power lasers can be used to study fundamental physics (QED, electroweak, BSM,...)

-
- Recent Theory Review: *Advances in QED with intense background fields*, A. Fedotov et al. Phys. Rep. **1010**, 1-138 (2023)
 - LUXE CDR: *Conceptual design report for the LUXE experiment*, H. Abramowicz et al. Eur. Phys. J. S. T. **230**, 2445-2560 (2021)
 - Possible future directions: G. Sarri et al. Eur. Phys. J. P. **140**, 1151 (2025)

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- Synergy of particle physics and laser physics is leading to new experimental prospects and simulation and theory developments
- At high χ , QED predicted to become strongly coupled - no methods available to calculate in this regime
- Precision experimental tests of radiation reaction at CLARA, LUXE (DESY) and elsewhere can provide much needed input.

-
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Backup Slides

- QED is a relativistic theory: observables should be expressed as Lorentz invariants
- Electromagnetic (EM) invariants:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{S} &= -\frac{1}{E_{\text{qed}}^2} \frac{1}{4} F_{\mu\nu} F^{\mu\nu} = \frac{\mathbf{E}^2 - \mathbf{B}^2}{2 E_{\text{qed}}^2}; \\ \mathcal{P} &= -\frac{1}{E_{\text{qed}}^2} \frac{1}{4} F_{\mu\nu} F^{*\mu\nu} = \frac{\mathbf{E} \cdot \mathbf{B}}{E_{\text{qed}}^2}\end{aligned}$$

- Probability P for QED processes in *constant* and *homogeneous* EM field:

$$P = P(\mathcal{S}, \mathcal{P}).$$

- For EM fields in the lab:

$$P \approx P(0, 0)$$

- Analytical solutions to:

$$(i\not{D} - m) \psi = 0$$

exist for: constant fields; Coulomb field... and **plane-wave** backgrounds

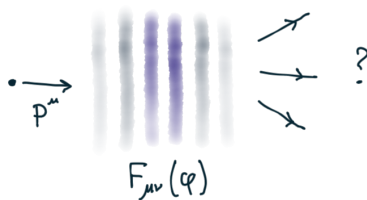
- Plane-wave background solution (Volkov wavefunction):

$$\psi_p = \left[1 + \frac{\not{n} \not{a}(\varphi)}{2 n \cdot p} \right] \frac{u_p}{\sqrt{2p^0 V}} e^{-ip \cdot x - i \int_{-\infty}^{\varphi} \frac{2p \cdot a(\phi) - a^2(\phi)}{2\omega n \cdot p} d\phi}$$

D. M. Volkov, Z. Phys. 94 250-260 (1935)

(Shorthand: $a(\varphi) = eA(\varphi)$, $\varphi = \omega n \cdot x$.)

- Spin-dependent pre-factor describing spin precession
 - Nonlinear phase describing all-order interaction with background.
- Semiclassical (WKB) *exact*: $-ip \cdot x - \int_{-\infty}^{\varphi} \frac{2p \cdot a(\phi) - a^2(\phi)}{2\omega n \cdot p} d\phi \equiv -iS_{\text{classical}}$



- Plane wave: $F^{\mu\nu} = F^{\mu\nu}(\varphi)$ where phase $\varphi = \omega n \cdot x$ and $n \cdot n = 0$.
- Vacuum no longer translational invariant: four-momentum no longer conserved (Noether's theorem)!
- 'Perpendicular momentum', $p^\perp$, and 'lightfront momentum' (projection onto wavevector n) are conserved.
e.g. if $n = (1, 0, 0, 1)$ i.e. laser propagating down z axis, then:

$$p^x, \quad p^y, \quad \text{and} \quad p^- = p^0 - p^z \quad \text{are conserved,}$$

whereas $p^+ = p^0 + p^z$ is **not** conserved.

Schwinger:

$$\frac{dP_{\text{Sch.}}}{dt} \propto \exp \left[-\frac{\pi E_{\text{qed}}}{E} \right]$$

- EM field: constant, homogeneous, $F^{\mu\nu}$.

$$\frac{dP_{\text{Sch.}}}{dt} \propto \exp \left[-\pi \frac{m^2}{\sqrt{4\pi\alpha_{\text{QED}}} E} \right].$$

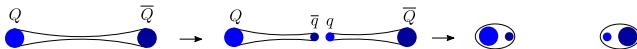
Nonlinear Breit-Wheeler:

$$\frac{dP_{\text{nbw}}}{d\varphi} \sim \exp \left[-\frac{8}{3\chi(\varphi)} \right]$$

- EM field: photon plus plane wave:
 $F^{\mu\nu} = F^{\mu\nu}(\chi \cdot x)$;

$$\frac{dP_{\text{nbw}}}{d\varphi} \sim \exp \left[-\frac{8}{3} \frac{m}{\omega_\gamma(1 + \cos\theta)} \frac{m^2}{\sqrt{4\pi\alpha_{\text{QED}}} E} \right]$$

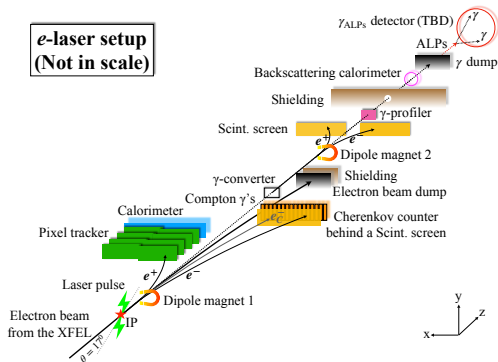
- c.f. “string-breaking” in QCD:



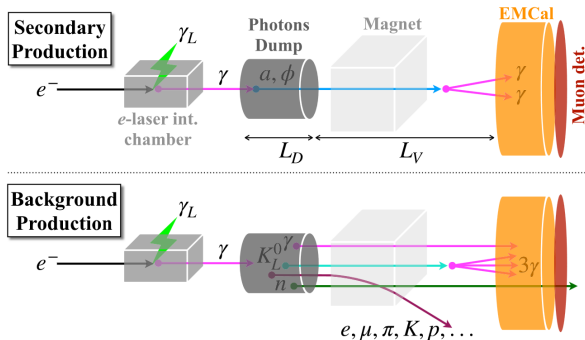
A. Casher, H. Neuberger, S. Nussinov, PRD **20**, 179 (1979)

- Non-analytic / ‘non-perturbative’ in α_{QED} : Can we measure this ‘tunneling-like’, ‘Schwinger-like’ pair creation in experiments?

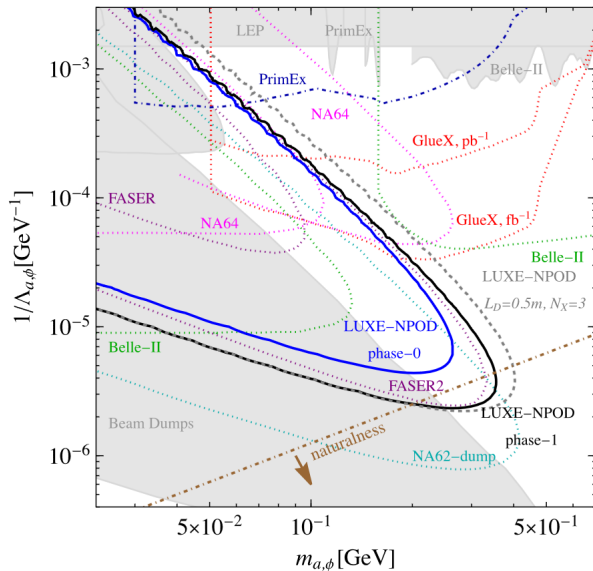
- Synergy of particle and high intensity laser physics allows for more precise measurements.



- LUXE-NPOD 'New Physics search with Optical Dump'



Z. Bai et al. Phys. Rev. D **106**, 115034 (2022)



- In *weak fields* ($\xi \ll 1$), we can perturbatively expand S_{fi} up to $O(\xi^2)$

The diagram shows the perturbative expansion of the transition amplitude T for muon decay. It is represented as a sum of six Feynman diagrams arranged in two rows of three. Each diagram shows an incoming muon line (solid) on the left that splits into an outgoing muon line (solid) and a neutrino line (wavy) on the right. The diagrams are separated by plus signs. The first three diagrams in the top row have a single vertical dashed line representing a photon. The first two diagrams in the bottom row have two vertical dashed lines, and the third diagram in the bottom row has three vertical dashed lines. These dashed lines represent interactions with an external electromagnetic field.

- In a *plane wave pulse of finite extent*, one finds:

$$T_{fi} = \underbrace{(\dots\dots) \delta^4(\Delta p)}_{\text{Vacuum term}} + \underbrace{(\dots\dots) \delta^{\perp,-}(\Delta p)}_{\text{Laser pulse term}},$$

where $\Delta p = p_{\text{out}} - p_{\text{in}}$ is the momentum change.

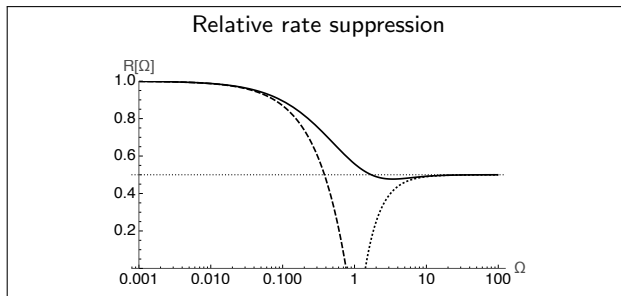
- Since:

$$\text{Prob}_{\text{vac}} \propto VT; \quad \text{Prob}_{\text{pulse}} \propto V\tau,$$

and $T \gg \tau$ (pulse duration), probability is **dominated by vacuum term**.

- Total vacuum decay rate:

$$W_{\text{vac}}(\xi) = \mathcal{R}[\Omega(\xi)] W_{\text{vac}}(0)$$



$$\mathcal{R}[\Omega] \approx \begin{cases} 1 - \frac{5\pi\Omega}{12} + \frac{\Omega^2}{18} (19 - 15\gamma - 15 \log \Omega), & (\Omega \ll 1) \\ \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{\Omega^2} + \frac{20}{\Omega^4} & (\Omega \gg 1) \end{cases}$$

BK and D.Liu, Phys. Rev. Lett. **135**, 251802 (2025)