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The cross section and decay angular distributions for the coherent $\phi$-meson photoproduction on the deuteron have been measured for the first time up to a squared four-momentum transfer $t = (p_p - p_d)^2 \approx -2 \text{GeV}^2/c^2$, using the CLAS detector at the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility. The cross sections are compared with predictions from a rescattering model. In a framework of vector meson dominance, the data are consistent with helicity conservation.

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The exchange of gluons between hadrons, known as Pomeron exchange [1], is a fundamental process that is expected to dominate hadron-hadron total cross sections at high energies. In general, multigluon exchange is harder to study at lower energy because diagrams including quark exchange play a more important role. The $\phi$ meson is unique in that it is nearly pure $s\bar{s}$ and hence multigluon exchange is expected to dominate $\phi$-N scattering at all energies. Because gluon exchange is flavor blind, information on multigluon exchange, isolated by the $\phi$-N interaction, would be universal and useful in models of hadron-hadron interactions. For example, information on the $\phi$-N interaction at very low energies, known as the QCD van der Waals interaction, is essential for the reliable prediction of the possible formation of a bound state in the $\phi$-N system [2].

The total $\phi$-N cross section ($\sigma_{\phi N}$) has been estimated by using vector-meson dominance (VMD) applied to exclusive $\phi$ photoproduction on the proton in the photon energy range $E_\gamma < 10 \text{ GeV}$, resulting in $\sigma_{\phi N} \simeq 10$–12 mb [3,4], which is in agreement with the estimate from the additive quark model [5] applied to $KN$- and $\pi N$-scattering data [6]. More recently, the inelastic $\phi$-N cross section $\sigma^{\text{inel}}_{\phi N}$ was extracted from the attenuation of $\phi$ mesons in photoproduction from Li, C, Al, and Cu nuclei [7]. The attenuation for large $A$ is significantly larger than that calculated from VMD. More sophisticated models [4,8,9] are consistent with the experiment if $\sigma^{\text{inel}}_{\phi N}$ is significantly larger ($\sim 30$ mb) compared with $\sigma_{\phi N}$ from the VMD model. The reason for the discrepancy of $\sigma_{\phi N}$ from these two estimates is not well understood. Here we will show that information on the $t$ dependence and spin structure of the $\phi$-N interaction provides essential clues to solve this problem.

In this Rapid Communication, the $\phi$-N interaction is investigated in coherent photoproduction on deuterium. The diagrams of the dominant processes contributing to the reaction $\gamma d \rightarrow \phi d$ are shown in Fig. 1. In the first diagram, Fig. 1(a), the $\phi$ is produced in a single scattering off a nucleon, which is dominant at small $-t$ and strongly suppressed at larger $-t$ due to the deuteron form factor. The second diagram, Fig. 1(b), shows double scattering, where the $\phi$ is produced at the first vertex and scatters from the other nucleon at the second vertex. The strength of the second interaction is gauged by $\sigma_{\phi N}$. The probability to undergo double scattering increases at larger $-t$ because both nucleons receive momentum transfer and may recombine into a final-state deuteron with a smaller relative momentum between the two nucleons [10].

The $\phi$ meson is a spin one particle that decays to a $K \bar{K}$ pair, i.e., two spinless particles. The decay angular distribution of the $\phi$ carries information on the spin structure of the reaction amplitude that is the sum of single- and double-scattering processes [11].
The measurement of the differential cross sections of coherent $\phi$ photoproduction and the decay angular distributions in a wide $t$ range allows one to study the $\phi$-$N$ interaction in both single and double scattering, as well as the transition from one to the other.

The data were collected with the CLAS detector and the Hall B tagged-photon beam at the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility [12]. The incident electron beam energy was 3.8 GeV, producing tagged photons in the range from 0.8 to 3.6 GeV. The photon beam was directed onto a 24-cm long liquid-deuterium target. The data acquisition trigger required two charged particles detected in coincidence with a tagged photon. Charged particles were momentum analyzed by the CLAS torus magnet and three sets of drift chambers. The torus magnet was run at two settings, low field (2250 A) and high field (3375 A), each for about half of the run period.

The acceptance was determined by using a GEANT-based Monte Carlo simulation [15]. A phenomenological function was used in an event generator to model the kinematical distributions. The simulation was iterated to reproduce the measured $t$, photon energy, and decay angular distributions. The acceptance was between 10% and 20% in the kinematic region covered by the present measurements. The accuracy of the calculation of the acceptance was estimated from the comparison of results from the other event reconstruction topologies ($dK^+K^-d$ and $f_0$ photoproduction) with the differential cross section and photon-energy distribution of events in the sidebands of the $\phi$-meson peak. The dependence of the yield on the background function, fit range, and parametrization of the Breit-Wigner function were studied. The extracted yield changes between 3% and 9% depending on the yield extraction procedures.

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The range 2. the correction for the relativistic-recoil effect [10]. The double amplitude was convoluted with the deuteron wave function with from the proton target run during this experiment. This am-

### Table I. Differential cross sections for the reaction $\gamma d \rightarrow \phi d$. The second and third numbers in each field are the statistical and systematic uncertainties, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$t$ range ($\text{GeV}^2/c^2$)</th>
<th>$d\sigma/dt$ [nb/(GeV$^2/c^2$)]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$t_{\text{min}}$</td>
<td>$t_{\text{max}}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.375</td>
<td>-0.350</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.400</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.425</td>
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<td>-0.500</td>
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<td>-0.550</td>
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<td>-0.700</td>
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<td>-1.200</td>
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<tr>
<td>-1.400</td>
<td>-1.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2.000</td>
<td>-1.400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total model uncertainty is estimated to be about 20%. A 10% uncertainty was assigned to the parametrization of the $\gamma N \rightarrow \phi N$ amplitude based on the $\gamma p \rightarrow \phi p$ data. The systematic uncertainties in the yield extraction and acceptance were estimated as a function of photon energy and $t$; they were between 4% and 13%. The combined systematic uncertainty for the luminosity and trigger efficiency was less than 10%. Systematic uncertainties from contributions from accidental tracks, target windows, and particle misidentification are less than a few percentages. The total systematic uncertainty was estimated as 11–17% by adding these uncertainties in quadrature.

The differential cross sections were measured in the ranges $1.6 < E_\gamma < 2.6 \text{ GeV}$ and $2.6 < E_\gamma < 3.6 \text{ GeV}$ [16]. They are given in Table I. Figure 4 shows the experimental data in the range $2.6 < E_\gamma < 3.6 \text{ GeV}$. The data are compared with theoretical calculations using a rescattering model [10,17]. In this model, the $\gamma N \rightarrow \phi N$ amplitude was parametrized by using published data on the $\gamma p \rightarrow \phi p$ reaction [18] and data from the proton target run during this experiment. This am-

![FIG. 3. Comparison of differential cross sections for $\gamma d \rightarrow \phi d$ from various topologies in the range $1.6 < E_\gamma < 3.6 \text{ GeV}$. Only statistical uncertainties are shown.](image)

![FIG. 4. Differential cross sections for the reaction $\gamma d \rightarrow \phi d$. The inner error bars shown are statistical uncertainty only, whereas the outer error bars are the sum of statistical and systematic uncertainties in quadrature. The curves A, B, and C are calculations from the rescattering model [10,17]; see text for details. The uncertainties on curves B and C are comparable to that of curve A but are not shown. The dot-dashed curve is a contribution from the single scattering diagram.](image)
effect of spin-flip in the process $\gamma N \to \phi N$ was ignored in the parametrization of the single scattering amplitude because the spin-flip amplitude is more suppressed in the coherent process than in the incoherent process. A 15% systematic uncertainty was assigned due to this effect [20]. An isospin dependence remains. This suggests that a larger dependence exists due to the strong correlation between them, assigned. An isospin dependence was assigned due to this effect [20]. An isospin dependence remains.

In addition to the differential cross sections, the decay angular distributions of the $\phi$ meson were also measured in the helicity frame [11]. The direction of the $\phi$-meson momentum in the CM system was chosen as the z axis, and the polar and azimuthal angle between the $K^+\phi$ momentum and the $\phi$-meson production plane were defined as $\theta_H$ and $\phi_H$ in the $\phi$-meson rest frame. Figure 5 shows the projections of the decay angular distributions onto $\cos \theta_H$ and $\phi_H$ in the ranges $-0.8 < t < -0.35$ GeV$^2$/c$^2$ and $-2.0 < t < -0.8$ GeV$^2$/c$^2$ in each photon energy region. The data are consistent with the prediction from helicity conservation (solid curves), i.e., the spin of the $\phi$ meson is aligned with the momentum of the $\phi$ meson. This is similar to what was observed in the $\phi$ photoproduction on the proton [24,25]. In the larger $-t$ region, the double-scattering contribution becomes more important. No drastic change is observed from the smaller $-t$ to the larger $-t$ region, implying that the spin structure of the single- and double-scattering processes are similar.

In summary, we have presented the first measurement of the differential cross sections and decay angular distributions for coherent $\phi$ photoproduction on the deuteron up to $t = -2.0$ GeV$^2$/c$^2$. The differential cross sections at large $-t$ exhibit a contribution from double scattering. The data are consistent with $\sigma_{\phi N} = 10$ mb in a framework of VMD. The data also provide a possible explanation for larger $\sigma_{\phi N}$ if the $t$ slope for $\phi N \to \phi N$ is larger than the VMD value from $\gamma p \to \phi p$. The decay angular distributions follow the prediction from helicity conservation.

This measurement demonstrates a new approach to the study of the $\phi-N$ interaction in the low-energy region where VMD is not necessarily a good approximation. Further measurements at higher photon energies [26], at very small $-t$ [27], as well as an A-dependence study in $e^+e^-\rightarrow\phi \eta$ decay [28] will make it possible to map out details of the energy and $t$ dependences of the $\phi-N$ interaction.

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[27] W. C. Chang et al., nucl-ex/0703034.