Proton-Proton Correlations in Two-Proton Radioactivity: Striking Observation for ^{94}Ag

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Radioactivity or spontaneous decay of atomic nuclei has been much studied ever since Becquerel discovered natural radioactivity in 1896. For proton-rich nuclei, one- and two-proton radioactivity was predicted in 1960 [1], with the former first observed in 1982 [2]. Two-proton radioactivity has also recently been detected, e.g. by experimentally studying the decay properties of ^{45}Fe [3, 4], but identification of two protons is missing from these experiments. We have measured proton-proton correlations in two-proton radioactivity of the high-spin isomer (21^{+}) in ^{94}Ag [5] which is also known to undergo one-proton decay [6] thus making the unique nuclear case. Striking 2p decay features are the proton-proton energy correlations and the unexpectedly large decay probability. These data can only be interpreted in a meaningful way by assuming simultaneous two-proton emission. Our results exclude sequential emission of protons via the intermediate nucleus ^{93}Pd. The two-proton decay pattern is explained by assuming that the parent nucleus is strongly cigar-like (prolate) deformed emitting the protons either from the same or from opposite ends of the cigar. This first measurement of correlations in 2p radioactivity, the nuclear-structure implications and plans for further experimental and theoretical studies of the properties of this truly exotic isomer will be presented.

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