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Field driven recovery of the collective spin dynamics of the chiral soliton lattice 2

F. J. T. Goncalves,<sup>1, a)</sup> Y. Shimamoto,<sup>2</sup> T. Sogo,<sup>2</sup> G. W. Paterson,<sup>3</sup> Y. Kousaka,<sup>2</sup> and Y. Togawa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf, Institute of Ion Beam Physics and Materials Research,

Bautzner Landstrasse 400, 01328 Dresden, Germany

<sup>2)</sup> Department of Physics and Electronics, Osaka Prefecture University, 1-1 Gakuencho, Sakai, Osaka 599-8531, Japan

<sup>3)</sup> SUPA. School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Glasgow, Glasgow,

G12 8QQ United Kingdom

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We investigate the magnetic field dependence of the spin excitation spectra of the chiral soliton lattice (CSL) in the helimagnet  $CrNb_3S_6$ , by means of microwave resonance spectroscopy. The CSL is a prototype of a noncollinear spin system that forms periodically over a macroscopic length scale. Following the field initialisation of the CSL, we found three collective resonance modes over an exceptionally wide frequency range. With further reducing the magnetic field towards 0 T, the spectral weight of these collective modes was disrupted by the emergence of additional resonances whose Kittel-like field dependence was linked to coexisting field polarised magnetic domains. The collective behaviour at a macroscopic level was only recovered upon reaching the helical magnetic state at 0 T. The magnetic history of this non collinear spin system can be utilized to control microwave absorption, with potential use in magnon driven devices.

19 tures have attracted immense attention due to their abil- 58 20 21 ity to act as magnonic conduits with programmable band 59 structure<sup>1-4</sup>. Naturally, good field stability and spatial  $_{60}$ 22 coherence of the underlying noncollinear magnetic struc- 61 23 ture are essential requirements to ensure efficient propa- 62 24 25 gation and manipulation of the magnonic signals. In this 63 sense, chiral helimagnetic materials are very promising as 64 26 the spatial coherence is built-in primarily due to an en- 65 27 ergy balance between the antisymmetric Dzyaloshinskii- 66 28 Moriya (DM) interaction<sup>5,6</sup> and the symmetric exchange 67 29 interaction, enabling spatially robust magnetic textures 68 30 such as magnetic skyrmions<sup>4,7,8</sup>, and the chiral helical 69 31 and the chiral spin soliton lattice phases<sup>9</sup>. In chiral heli- 70 32 magnetic materials, periodically self-assembled magnetic  $_{71}$ 33 elements emerge and can be tuned efficiently with an 72 external magnetic field. When dealing with magnetic 73 35 materials capable of hosting these 'naturally' assembled 74 36 spin textures, there is the need to assess the impact of 75 magnetic disorder and defects as these can disrupt the 76 spatial coherence and consequently affect the collective  $\pi$ 39 excitations and the propagation of spin waves. 40

41 In this letter we report the existence of three spin res-79 onance regimes observed while varying the external mag- 80 42 netic field within the CSL phase of a chiral helimagnetic <sup>81</sup> 43 44 crystal, CrNb3S6, with micrometer sized dimensions. In 82 45 micrometer sized crystals as such, there exists an energy 33 barrier that opposes an otherwise continuous transition 84 46 from a field saturated phase to the CSL phase<sup>10</sup>. During 85 47 the field process of overcoming this energy barrier, mag-  $_{\rm 86}$ 48 netic disorder can appear in the form of magnetic dis- 87 49 50 locations which then vanish at zero magnetic field<sup>11</sup>. In <sup>88</sup> our experimental results, the magnetic field range where 89 51 each of the three distinct resonance regimes was observed 90 52 is qualitatively coincident with that of the magnetic dis- 91 53 locations discussed in Ref. 11. 54 92

In the field regime that precedes the emergence 93 55 of a significant number of magnetic dislocations, mi-94 56

Recently, magnetic systems with noncollinear spin tex- 57 crowave spectroscopy experiments detected three resonance modes, concurrent with the onset of the CSL phase. The lowest order modes were detected at 14-20 GHz while a higher order mode appeared at approximately twice this frequency. The multi-mode character of the spin excitation spectra is linked to the periodic nonlinear modulation of the moments forming the CSL and is reported here following its theoretical prediction<sup>12–14</sup> The overcoming of the energy barrier occurs with further decreasing the field strength towards 0 T. Here, we found two types of modes which we ascribe to intrinsic CSL modes and ferromagnetic, Kittel-like modes, indicating the existence of a disordered CSL phase. Interestingly, upon switching the polarization of external magnetic field through 0 T, we found a clear transformation in the amplitude and field dependence of the resonance modes measured in the increasing field branch towards the critical field. The emergence of the helical state at 0 T triggered the extinction of the disordered phase, enabling the recovery of the collective spin excitation expected for an ideal, ordered CSL phase. Thus we shed light on the differences between the spin excitation spectra of ordered and disordered CSL phases in micrometer sized crystals and reveal a magnetic field protocol that triggers only the spin wave resonance of the ordered CSL phase.

> The spin configuration of the helimagnetic compound CrNb<sub>3</sub>S<sub>6</sub> at 0 T (below a critical temperature of 127 K) corresponds to the chiral helical state consisting of  $2\pi$ magnetic kinks (MKs) arrayed with a periodicity of  $48 \text{ nm}^{6,15}$ . Due to the symmetry of the crystal, two types of field driven phase transitions can occur. When a magnetic field is applied parallel to the chiral helical axis, the helical state undergoes a transition to the saturated state via a conical phase. In this case, the spins cant towards the helical axis until the saturation is reached at a field magnitude of 2  $T^{13}$ . On the other hand, when a magnetic field is applied perpendicular to the helical

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axis, the chiral spin soliton lattice (CSL) emerges<sup>15</sup>. The 95 CSL is comprised of MKs periodically distanced by re-96 gions with field polarised spins. The periodicity of the 97 MKs increases with the strength of H until a critical 98 field,  $H_C$ , is reached. Above  $H_C$  the field polarised (FP) 99 phase is obtained. In this field configuration, the magnitude of  $H_C$  varies between 0.15 and 0.24 T<sup>16–18</sup>. Several 100 101 interesting features of the CSL such as spatial coherence, 102 103 robustness with regards to the magnetic field and dis-104 cretized behavior can be found in the literature, both in the limits of small micrometer sized  $^{16,19-22}$  and in bulk 105 specimens<sup>23,24</sup> 106

Bulk crystals of  $CrNb_3S_6$  were grown using a chem-107 ical vapour transport method<sup>23,25</sup>. A micrometer sized 108 rectangular specimen was cut from a bulk crystal using a 109 focused ion beam technique and attached onto the signal 110 line of a coplanar waveguide using tungsten. The length 111 along the helical axis, the width parallel to H, and thick-112 ness of the specimen were 58.6, 12.4 and 2.6  $\mu$ m, respec-113 tively. In the present experiments, the microwave field 114 driving the spin precession was set perpendicular to the 115 chiral axis (for details, see Sec. I in suppl. material). 116 117

A coplanar-waveguide based microwave spectroscopy technique was employed to measure the spin excitation 118 spectra via the forward transmission parameter  $S_{21}$  as 119 a function of the frequency and the magnetic field (see Suppl. Material for details). The corrected magnitude and the field derivative of  $S_{21}$  are referred to as  $\Delta S$  and  $\mathrm{d}\Delta\mathrm{S}/\mathrm{d}H,$  respectively. In the experiments, the magnitude of the external field, |H|, was first decreased from large field values (well above  $H_C$ ) to 0 T and then increased from 0 T up to large fields, and these are referred to as decreasing an increasing field sweeps, respectively.

128 Figure 1(a) shows the amplitude of  $\Delta S$  obtained while varying the magnitude of  $\mu_0 H$  from -200 mT to 200 mT, 129 in field steps of 5 mT, at a temperature of 20 K. In the 130 field polarized (FP) phase, we identified three to four res-131 onance modes with a Kittel-type field dependence, which 132 is consistent with previous reports<sup>26,27</sup>. At a magnetic 133 field of -138 mT  $(H_J)$ , the Kittel-like modes were re-134 placed by three resonance branches whose field depen-135 dence is labeled as type-I modes. This transformation 136 in resonance behavior marked the emergence of the CSL 137 phase. As the field magnitude was decreased further, the 138 resonance frequency of the two type-I modes at lower fre-139 quencies varied between 14 to 20 GHz while the frequency 140 of the third mode increased rapidly from 18 to 35 GHz. 141 Between -138 mT and -100 mT the type-I modes fol-142 lowed the outset of a dome-like field dependence, which 143 144 is consistent with the expected behavior in the intrinsic CSL phase<sup>12,13</sup>. In order to clarify the field behavior of<sup>453</sup> 145 the type-I modes, we show the field derivative plot of  $\Delta S^{^{154}}$ 146 in Fig. 1(b) which highlights the existence of three res-147 onance modes. Figure 1(c) shows the amplitude profile  $^{\rm 156}$ 148 of the resonance mode observed at high frequencies, for<sup>1</sup> 149 different values of H. 150

In the field range between -100 mT and 0 mT, in addi-151 tion to the type-I modes, we observed a number of other  $^{100}_{161}$ 152



FIG. 1 (Color online). (a) Amplitude of  $\Delta S$  plotted as a function of frequency, f and external magnetic field,  ${\cal H}.$  The horizontal lines indicate the magnetic phases FP, disordered-CSL, CSL and their arrowheads indicate the field field sweep direction. The elongated triangles displayed vertically indicate the fields where the number of type-II modes changed abruptly (b) Plot of  $d\Delta S/dH$  as a function of f and H. Data obtained while a sweeping  $\mu_0 H$  from -200 mT to +200 mT in field steps of 1 mT. (c) Line trace of the high order mode plotted as a function of f in the vicinity of  $H_C$ . Markers indicate the center frequency of the resonance. (d) Amplitude profiles of  $\Delta S$  at the various stages of the field sweep (dashed lines in (a)). Open and full black arrows indicate the center frequency of the resonance modes of type-I/III and type-II modes, respectively. The line traces are Lorentzian fits to the various resonance modes.

resonance modes which clearly do not follow the field dependence intrinsic to the collective dynamics of the CSL. These are indicated in Figs. 1(a) and (b) as type-II modes. With decreasing the field magnitude towards 0 T, each of these modes decreased linearly in frequency and disappeared suddenly at certain fields, as indicated by the triangular markers. In this field region we observed five to six resonance modes which vanished sequentially from lower to higher frequencies



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The switching of the field polarity, from small nega-162 tive to positive fields  $(-5 \rightarrow 5 \text{ mT})$ , which expectedly 163 enabled the appearance of the helical state, resulted in 164 both the vanishing of the type-II modes and the sharp 165 increase in the amplitude of the microwave absorption of 166 the resonance modes identified as type-III in Fig. 1(a). 167 The change in the resonance spectra can be visualized 168 also in Fig. 1(d) which shows absorption lines mea-169 170 sured at various magnetic field values before (i-ii) and after 0 T (iii-v), also corresponding to the vertical 171 dashed lines in Fig. 1(a). Note that the frequency 172 spreading of the resonance modes in Fig. 1(d)-(ii) is 173 wider by 3 GHz compared to (iii) due to the existence of 174 the type-II modes indicated by the solid arrows, at lower 175 frequencies 176

The field dependence of the resonances is discussed fur-177 ther with reference to Fig. 2(a), which shows the absorp-178 tion amplitude of the main type-I (H < 0) and type-III 179 (H > 0) modes plotted as a function of H. We observed 180 an increase in the amplitude of the main type-I mode be-181 tween -138 mT and -100 mT, followed by a decrease at<sup>220</sup> 182  $\mu_0 H > -100$  mT, ascribed to the emergence of the type-  $^{221}$ 183 II modes. Above 0 T, a drastic increase in the amplitude  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 222}$ 184 of the type-III modes was observed. 185

Despite the much larger resonance amplitude above<sup>224</sup> 186 0 T, the frequency of the two pairs of type-III modes  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 225}$ 187 seemed to connect smoothly across 0 T to the type- $I^{226}$ 188 modes observed in the decreasing field branch. However,<sup>227</sup> 189 at increasingly large values of  $\tilde{H}$  in the increasing field  $^{^{228}}$ 190 process, the resonances deviated from the dome-like field<sup>229</sup> 191 dependence of the type-I modes. Instead, the resonance<sup>2</sup> 192 frequency increased slowly at low fields and then  $\operatorname{more}^{^{231}}$ 193 rapidly as H approached  $H_C$ . Note that in the increas-<sup>232</sup> 194 ing field branch (H > 0), each broad resonance was com-<sup>233</sup> 195 prised of two overlapping modes with similar field depen-<sup>234</sup> 196 dences, as shown in Fig. 1(d). Importantly, the resonance<sup>235</sup> 197 frequency of the type-III modes followed a field depen-  $^{\rm 236}$ 198 dence that is neither the intrinsic dome-like CSL behavior  $^{\rm 237}$ 199 of the type-I modes nor the Kittel-like dependence of the<sup>2</sup> 200 type-II modes observed in the decreasing field branch. 201

In the resonance spectra observed near  $H_C \sim 150~{\rm mT}^{^{240}}$ 202 we observed a field region, between 140 mT and 160 mT,  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 241}$ 203 where the resonance modes attributed to the CSL and  $^{^{242}}$ 204 FP phases appear to coexist. We chose  $H_C$  as the field<sup>243</sup> 205 magnitude above which the resonance attributed to the  $^{24}$ 206 CSL decreased pronouncedly while the Kittel-like reso-245 207 nances have clearly recovered. Well above  $H_C$ , the reso-<sup>246</sup> 208 nances exhibited a field dependence similar to that of the<sup>247</sup> 209 Kittel-like modes previously identified in the FP phase. 210

Previous experimental and theoretical results  $\mathrm{have}^{^{249}}$ 211 shown that the collective spin dynamics of the CSL in  $^{250}$ 212 finite size specimens depends strongly on the shape, the<sup>251</sup> 213 boundary conditions and on the intrinsic dynamics of the<sup>252</sup> 214  $\rm MKs^{14,26,27}.$  In Refs. 26 and 27, which focused on smaller  $^{253}$ 215 specimens with a reduced number of MKs, the resonance<sup>2</sup> 216 behavior in the decreasing field process was characterized  $^{\rm 255}$ 217 by a sharp frequency jump of typically 1.5-2.0 GHz, at<sup>256</sup> 218  $\mu_0 H_J \sim 0.6 H_C$ . This abrupt jump has been widely ob-257 219 258



FIG. 2 (Color online). (a) Absorption amplitude of the main resonance peak of type-I and type-III modes attributed to the CSL, plotted as a function of H. The colored lines mark the same fields as shown in Fig. 1. (b) Absorption amplitude of the high order mode as a function of H in the vicinity of  $H_J$  (dashed line is a guide to the eye).

served through various physical properties and has been recently attributed to the existence an energy barrier that controls the insertion of the MKs in the decreasing field process<sup>10</sup>. The disordered phase was not unequivocally identified due to a more ordered phase transition and possibly due to a lower signal to noise ratio because of the sample size. In the present specimen, the abrupt frequency jump was not clearly observed. The absence of a clear jump in the resonance frequency and the fact that the magnitude of  $H_I$  is comparable to  $H_C$  appears to have promoted a near continuous formation of the CSL with decreasing  $\mu_0 H$  from -138 mT to 0 T. Hence, the observation of a dome-like field dependence on the type-I modes during the field decreasing process. The dome-like field dependence of the type-I resonance modes is consistent with the previous theoretical studies on the intrinsic excitation spectra of the CSL. Particularly in Ref. 12, where, in addition to the overall dome-shaped field dependence, it is discussed that the nth order CSL modes are dependent on a set of wavevectors linked to the spin modulation period of the MKs and that these modes can exist over a wide frequency range. Moreover, a rapid increase in the resonance frequency of the higher order modes and a simultaneous decrease of the mode amplitude is expected to occur with increasing the density of MKs.

In the present Letter, the observation of the high order mode is an indication of the magnonic character of the CSL which so far has only been discussed from the theoretical standpoint in Ref. 12. In particular, we confirmed that the resonance of at least one collective mode of the CSL increased markedly, from about 18 GHz up to 35 GHz, and that the amplitude of the high order mode varied rapidly (see Fig. 2(b)) in the vicinity of  $H_J$ (or  $H_C$ ), where a considerable increase in the density of MKs is expected to occur<sup>12</sup>.

The field dependence of the resonances is discussed further with reference to Fig. 2(a), which shows the absorption amplitude of the main type-I (H < 0) and type-III



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(H > 0) modes plotted as a function of H. We observed 259 260 an increase in the amplitude of the main type-I mode between -138 mT and -100 mT, followed by a decrease at 261  $\mu_0 H > -100$  mT, ascribed to the emergence of the type-262 II modes. Above 0 T, a drastic increase in the amplitude 263 of the type-III modes was observed. 264

The coexistence of the low order type-I modes with the 265 Kittel-like type-II modes strongly suggests that the CSL 266 267 is mixed with regions where ferromagnetic alignment per-268 sists, possibly along with a large number of magnetic dislocations. The number and amplitude of type-II modes 269 in the decreasing field process is linked to the spatial dis-270 tribution and extent of the magnetic dislocations which 271 in turn reflects on the contribution from the regions with 272 ferromagnetic alignment. Presumably, such overall dis-273 ordered state was responsible for the partial disruption 274 of the intrinsic collective resonance of the CSL, thereby 275 preventing the CSL from acting as a collective entity at 276 a macroscopic length scale. 277 278

The enhancement of the collective resonance behavior of the type-III modes (H > 0 T) is believed to have been 279 enabled by the expulsion of the magnetic dislocations.

So far, only spectroscopic techniques such as microwave resonance have been employed in the detection of  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 317}$ 282 the disordered CSL phase mainly due to specimen thick-  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 318}$ 283 ness (2.6  $\mu{\rm m}).$  However, recent studies of much thin-  $^{\rm 319}$ ner specimens ( $\sim$  100 nm), using the Lorentz mode of  $^{\rm 320}$ transmission electron microscopy, showed the existence<sup>321</sup> of magnetic edge dislocations, which are a signature  $\mathrm{of}^{^{322}}$ magnetic disorder in the CSL phase. It is important to  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 323}$ note that, in a clear resemblance to the data discussed  $^{324}$ here, the magnetic dislocations were only observed while  $^{\rm 325}$ 290 imaging in the decreasing field process<sup>11</sup>

With changing the polarity of H via zero magnetic<sup>327</sup> 292 field and the consequent emergence of the chiral  $\mathrm{helical}^{^{328}}$ 293 state, the type-II modes vanished, triggering a different<sup>329</sup> 294 form of collective dynamics of the CSL. This is clearly  $^{\rm 330}$ 295 seen through the increase in amplitude of the type-III  $^{331}$ 296 modes above 0 T and the sloped field dependence which<sup>332</sup> 297 differs from that observed in the type-I modes. In fact,  $\mathrm{a}^{\scriptscriptstyle 333}$ 298 behaviour similar to that of the type-III modes has been  $^{334}$  seen in previous experiments  $^{26},$  where a sloped field de- $^{335}$ 299 300 pendence was observed when following the same excita-  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 336}$ 301 tion configuration. The mechanism behind this sloped<sup>337</sup> 302 field behaviour is not clearly understood as more theo-303 retical and experimental work is necessary on this front.  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 339}$ 304

305 In light of the present experiments and recent theoretical considerations<sup>28</sup>, one possible explanation might be<sup>341</sup> 306 that the collective resonance of the CSL became strongly  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 342}$ 307 dependent on the boundary spins due to the re-ordering<sup>343</sup> 308 of the spins near the surface (at 0 T). While the type- $I^{344}$ 309 modes reflect the intrinsic, bulk-like, response of the CSL,<sup>345</sup> 310 311 the type-III modes are a result of a collective CSL dynamics imposed by the boundary conditions which ulti-<sup>347</sup> 312 mately are dependent on the strength of the external field<sup>3</sup> 313 (hence the sloped behavior). The absence of ferromag-314 netic domains and magnetic dislocations contributed  ${\rm to}^{_{350}}$ 315 an increase in the absorption amplitude and an enhance-<sup>351</sup> 352



FIG. 3 (Color online). Plot of  $d\Delta S/dH$  as a function of f and H, corresponding to the increasing field branch of (i) a minor field loop and (ii) the increasing field branch obtained in a field sweep from -200 mT to 200 mT. The reversal field of minor loop (i) was 0.03 T. Data obtained at T = 50 K. The horizontal arrows indicate the field sweep direction and inset illustrates the field process followed in (i) and (ii).

ment in the coupling between the microwave fields and the collective spin excitation modes of the CSL defined by the boundary spins. In the decreasing field process, the effect of the boundary spins on the collective CSL dynamics could have been suppressed due to the existence of a disordered phase.

In Fig. 3, we demonstrate the applicability and robustness of the resonance spectra corresponding to a magnetically ordered CSL phase at a macroscopic length scale. Once the disorder was removed from the specimen, the enhanced collective resonance of the ordered CSL phase persisted at all field values below  $H_C$ , regardless of which field sweep direction is adopted (0  $\rightarrow~-200~{\rm mT}$  in (i) or  $0 \rightarrow 200$  mT in (ii)). Clearly, this enhanced response is symmetric with regards to the magnitude of H, which contrasts with the disrupted CSL dynamics obtained when in the presence of magnetic disorder, as already presented in Fig. 1.

In the data shown in Fig. 1(a), the high order mode is not clearly identified in the increasing field branch due to loss in sensitivity on that experiment. However, the data presented in Fig. 3 shows an high order resonance mode, as indicated by the red vertical arrows and dashed lines both in (i) and (ii) (see Sec. II in the Suppl. Material).

Following the qualitative interpretation above, the experimental results may be summarized in the following manner. A disordered CSL, comprised of CSL and embedded ferromagnetic domains, produced two types of resonance modes with distinct and independent field behavior. As H approached 0 T, the resonance attributed to the ferromagnetic domains disappeared gradually until the helical phase was reached at 0 T. At this point, a pronounced increase in the amplitude of the resonance modes was observed, suggesting that the ferromagnetic domains or the magnetic dislocations were disrupting the collective spin precession of the CSL. Once the helical



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phase was reached, the whole system resumed the col-401 353 354 lective behavior, which consisted of a number resonance<sup>402</sup> modes with large amplitude and similar field behavior.  $^{\scriptscriptstyle 403}$ 355

Importantly, we have demonstrated that the disor-356 dered state and inherent microwave resonance spectra406 357 can be completely erased and the collective dynamics re-407 358 stored simply by sweeping the external field through the408 359 helical magnetic phase at 0 T. The control over the degree<sup>409</sup> 360 of magnetic disorder in the CSL which was facilitated by  $^{410}_{411}$ 361 362 choice of field process can potentially enable the forma- $\frac{311}{412}$ tion of field controlled channels of MKs that could serve<sub>413</sub> 363 as spin wave conduits. 364 415

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The supplemental material contains further details on<sup>421</sup> 366 the experimental procedure, including a scanning elec-422 367 tron microscope image of the specimen. Supplementary<sup>423</sup> 368 369 data on the origin and field robustness of the type-I and  $\frac{424}{425}$ type-II modes is presented. In particular, data concern-426 370 ing a minor field loop that helped identifying the origin<sup>427</sup> 371 of the type-II modes. This data shows the higher or-428 372 der type-I modes on both the decreasing and increasing  $^{429}_{430}$ 373 magnetic field sweeps. 374 431

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<sup>a</sup>Electronic mail: f.goncalves@hzdr.de 387

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