

## Exploring the limits of existence of proton-rich nuclei in the $Z = 70\text{--}82$ region

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$\alpha$ -,  $\beta$ -, and proton-decay energies have been combined with TITAN mass values for  $^{150\text{--}157}\text{Yb}$  to expand and refine the mass surface in the proton-rich  $Z = 70\text{--}82$  region. The calculations were performed using the Atomic Mass Evaluation (AME) algorithm, resulting in 11 new ground-state masses and uncertainty reductions of nine others. The new information allows the determination of the two-proton drip line for elements between Ir and Pb and provides indications of possible new candidates for two-proton emission. In addition, we examined binding energies in this region for Thomas-Ehrman shifts, so far only visible for light nuclides.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

A stringent test of a global nuclear theory is the prediction of the number of bound nuclides, determined from neutron and proton emission, in addition to spontaneous fission [1]. The limits to the nuclear chart are defined by the so-called driplines, beyond which no additional neutron or proton can be added to the nucleus. Except for lighter systems, the neutron dripline extends to isotopes located well beyond what is reachable experimentally, whereas the proton dripline is located much closer to stability, due to Coulomb-repulsion effects that grow with increasing atomic number,  $Z$ . The process of proton emission [2] is therefore intriguing since it can be energetically possible and experimentally within reach. Ground-state proton emission, first observed from  $^{151}\text{Lu}$  [3] and  $^{147}\text{Tm}$  [4] in 1982, is now known to occur in over 50 cases. Rarer is the process of two-proton decay [5], first seen from  $^{45}\text{Fe}$  only 20 years ago [6,7] and the recent spectacular observation of sequential  $2p$  decays from  $^{18}\text{Mg}$ , via  $^{16}\text{Ne}$  to  $^{14}\text{O}$  [8]. Two-proton decay has now been observed up to  $^{67}\text{Kr}$  ( $Z = 36$ ) [9] and gives unique information about the exotic parent nuclide.

Finding heavier candidates for two-proton decay requires, among other properties [5], knowledge of the mass surface at the dripline, since it is the binding energy that determines the amount of energy available for nuclear decay. Already for  $A > 100$  proton decay is in strong competition with  $\alpha$  decay, which is also the case below the  $Z = 82$  shell closure. Novikov *et al.* [10] describe this peculiar region as the “littoral shallow”, where nuclides are proton unbound but do not

emit protons due to the large Coulomb barrier that slows the tunneling process and allows them to  $\beta$  (or  $\alpha$ ) decay instead.

In addition to the discovery of candidates for two-proton emission, knowledge of the mass surface can probe exotic phenomena such as the existence of the Thomas-Ehrman shift [11]. Since it was discovered, in the 1950s in  $^{13}\text{C}$  and  $^{13}\text{N}$  [12,13], the Thomas-Ehrman shift has been repeatedly measured in light systems [11], but it has never been observed in heavy nuclei [10,14].

In general, binding energies or masses are either determined from reactions and decays or directly by mass spectrometry. Currently, for heavier nuclides near the proton dripline,  $\alpha$  decay is the dominant source, however only mass differences are obtained. Unless the mass of at least an  $\alpha$ -decay daughter nucleus is known, none of the decay energies can be linked to the mass surface (also true for  $\beta$  decay). Moreover,  $\alpha$  decay follows a path that is less than parallel to the proton dripline, thwarting the mass determination of more exotic nuclides. Mass spectrometry can provide a complementary solution if one of the nuclides in the chain can be measured.

The combination of reaction, decay, and mass spectrometric data obtained worldwide is performed periodically within the Atomic Mass Evaluation (AME), and leads to the table of atomic masses. The most recent publication AME2020 [15] includes several  $\alpha$ -decay chains for which the masses were extrapolated since no links to known masses existed.

Considering all the known decay energies, a reaction network can be constructed, where the known  $\alpha$ -reaction

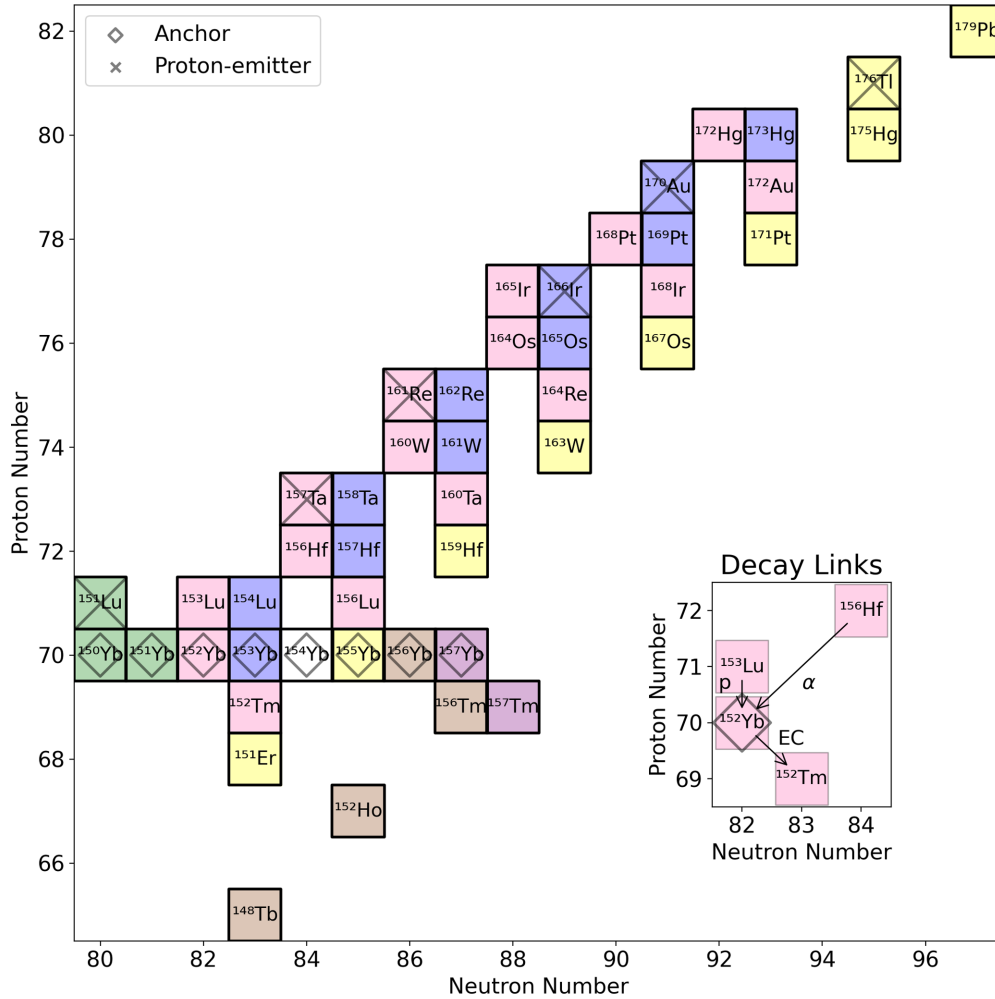


FIG. 1. Connection diagram of all isotopes determined in this work; all isotopes that share the same color (chains) are connected by known  $Q_\alpha$ ,  $Q_\beta$ , or  $S_p$ . The masses of these isotopes are determined using known decay energies and the AME algorithm. The anchors of the chains are represented with diamonds, while the one-proton emitters are marked with x symbols. The insert shows an example of how nuclei link to  $^{152}\text{Yb}$ .

and proton-separation energies can be expressed as mass differences. However, the masses themselves cannot be determined unless at least one mass in the network is experimentally determined. We refer to the experimentally determined mass as the anchor, since it has the property of anchoring the masses of all nuclides linked in the network. This, in turn, allows the calculation of proton binding over a large number of proton and neutron numbers, which is extremely challenging to measure directly.

Using TRIUMF's Ion Trap for Atomic and Nuclear science (TITAN) [16], we recently measured the masses of neutron-deficient isotopes  $^{150-157}\text{Yb}$  ( $Z = 70$ ) [17] with the TITAN MR-ToF MS [18]. Experimental details of the operation of the device can be found in [19]. These masses anchor a number of  $\alpha$  chains in the  $Z = 70-82$  region [20] and therefore give information about the topology of the shore, revealing possible proton emitters that allow us to wade in the sea of instability and explore the littoral shallow.

In the following section we describe the AME procedure for anchoring these decay chains and present the new mass values, before examining the updated mass surface in Sec. III

and searching for signs of the Thomas-Ehrman shift [11] in Sec. IV.

## II. CALCULATION PROCEDURE

In the framework of the Atomic Mass Evaluation (AME) algorithm [21] the nuclear chart is represented as a reaction network. Depending on how many connections are used to determine the mass of a nuclide, each nuclide is categorized as primary (with multiple connection links) or secondary (with a single connection link). Anchoring several nuclides belonging to an  $\alpha$  chain to other primary nuclides therefore transforms the member masses from unknown into primary.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, the measured Yb isotopes (marked with diamonds) are connected via known  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ , and proton decay energies to nuclides that reach as far as  $^{179}\text{Pb}$  ( $Z = 82$ ). The Yb mass values that contributed significantly in reducing uncertainties and determining other unmeasured masses were those of  $^{150,152,153}\text{Yb}$ . The ground-state mass-excess values and isomeric energies calculated from the five anchors can be

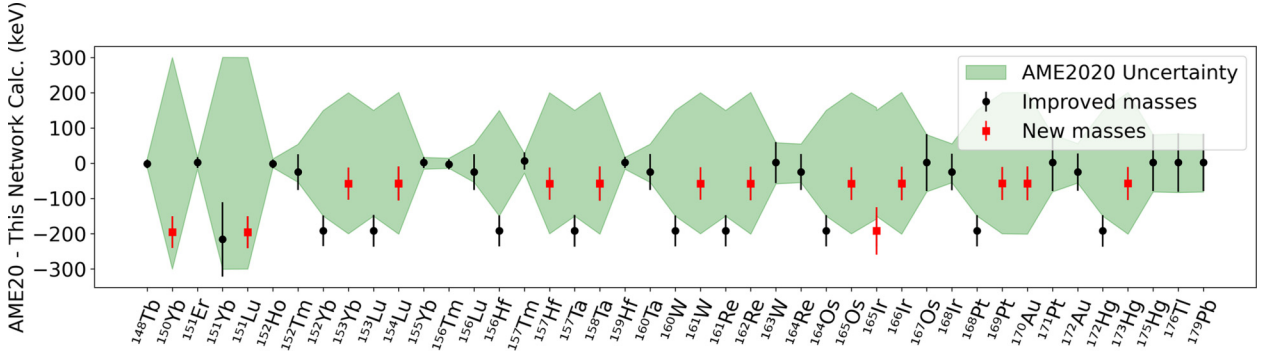


FIG. 2. Comparison between AME2020 and the masses determined in this work. The green area indicates the AME2020 uncertainty. Nuclides with similar deviations belong to a common  $\alpha$  chain and their deviation arises from the deviation in the mass of the  $\alpha$  chain anchor.

seen in Table I and the deviation between the ground state masses and their AME2020 values is depicted in Fig. 2.

The AME algorithm can be depicted as a network of interconnected nuclei, where their masses are linked by the experimentally measured decays. In this work, and in accordance with [21], we entered the new masses in the form of mass ratios  $R = m_{\text{ion}}/m_{\text{ion}}^{\text{cal}}$ , where  $m_{\text{ion}}$  the mass of the ion measured with the TITAN MR-TOF-MS and  $m_{\text{ion}}^{\text{cal}}$  is the mass of an isobaric calibrant ion observed in the same mass spectrum. The advantage of this format is that any subsequent change in the mass of the calibrant ion is automatically incorporated in the future mass evaluations. The entered ratios are then converted to linear equations of masses of neutral atoms according to the recipe described in Ref. [21] and the primary masses are adjusted by solving the equation

$$\mathbf{K} |m\rangle = |E\rangle \quad (1)$$

using the least-squares minimization method. In Eq. (1),  $\mathbf{K}$  is the connectivity matrix,  $|m\rangle$  are the masses that are being adjusted, and  $|E\rangle$  is the array of the decay energies.

In the neutron deficient side of the nuclear chart, the connectivity matrix  $\mathbf{K}$  is constructed from known  $\alpha$  decays, proton-separation energies as well as  $\beta$  decays/ Electron Captures (EC):

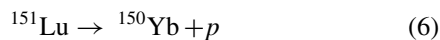
$$m(Z, A) - m(Z - 2, A - 4) = Q_{\alpha}/c^2 + m(^4\text{He}), \quad (2)$$

$$-m(Z, A) + m(Z - 1, A - 1) = S_p/c^2 - m(^1\text{H}), \quad (3)$$

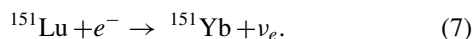
$$-m(Z, A) + m(Z - 2, A - 2) = S_{2p}/c^2 - 2m(^1\text{H}), \quad (4)$$

$$m(Z, A) - m(Z - 1, A) = Q_{\text{EC}}/c^2. \quad (5)$$

As an example, two of the nuclides that were used as an input to the AME algorithm in this work were  $^{150,151}\text{Yb}$ . Both of them can be used to determine the mass of the parent  $^{151}\text{Lu}$  through the decays



and



With the aid of the known decay energies  $S_p \pm \delta S_p$  and  $Q_{\text{EC}} \pm \delta Q_{\text{EC}}$ , the mass of  $^{151}\text{Lu}$  can be adjusted by solving

Eq. (1) for the two decays

$$\begin{bmatrix} -1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} m^{151}\text{Lu} \\ m^{150}\text{Yb} \\ m^{151}\text{Yb} \\ m^1\text{H} \\ m^4\text{He} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} S_p \pm \delta S_p \\ Q_{\text{EC}} \pm \delta Q_{\text{EC}} \end{bmatrix}.$$

A complete connection network involving all Yb isotopes presented in this work can be constructed in the same way. More detailed information about the AME algorithm can be found in Ref. [15].

A schematic of the complete connection network concerning this work can be seen in Fig. 1. For simplicity, only the isotopes whose mass uncertainty was improved in this work are depicted in the figure. Isotopes with the same color represent groups that are linked by either  $\alpha$  or proton or  $\beta$  decay (an example is illustrated in the inset of Fig. 1).

In total, the anchors  $^{152,153,155,156}\text{Yb}$  give access to seven different  $\alpha$  chains as can be seen in Fig. 1. Both the  $\alpha$  chains anchored to  $^{152,153}\text{Yb}$  are interlinked with two other  $\alpha$  chains via the proton emitters  $^{157}\text{Ta}$ ,  $^{161}\text{Re}$ , and  $^{166}\text{Ir}$  and  $^{170}\text{Au}$ , respectively. The masses in the  $\alpha$  chain involving  $^{152}\text{Yb}$  have previously been determined with a precision of 150 keV [15] while the ones in the  $\alpha$  chain of  $^{153}\text{Yb}$  have never been determined before. In total, considering all the Yb isotopes entered in the connection network, we were able to determine the mass of 11 new ground states and improve the precision of nine other ground-state masses by more than a factor of 2 in the region between  $Z = 71$  and  $Z = 82$ . The adjusted mass excess  $\text{ME} = m(Z, A) - A$  values of all isotopes determined in this work are listed in Table I. Due to a 200 keV deviation between the previous mass value for  $^{152}\text{Yb}$  and the TITAN measurement, the masses of all isotopes in the chain anchored by  $^{152}\text{Yb}$  have been shifted by  $\approx 200$  keV, as can be seen in Fig. 2. Overall, our results are in agreement with the 2020 Atomic Mass Evaluation [15].

### III. SEPARATION ENERGIES AND THE TWO-PROTON DRIPLINE

The one and two-proton separation energies were calculated from the ME values of Table I. The one-proton separation energy,  $S_p$ , defined in Eq. (3), expresses the energy

TABLE I. The mass excess (ME) of the isotopes determined in this work and their corresponding ME from AME2020. The last four columns contain the one ( $S_p$ ) and two-proton separation energies ( $S_{2p}$ ) as calculated from the ME values determined in this work. The calculated  $S_p$  and  $S_{2p}$  only consider transitions between ground states. The anchors that were used in this study from [17] are noted with an asterisk while values accompanied by the # symbols in the columns ME<sub>AME2020</sub> and its uncertainty (unc.) represent AME2020 extrapolations [15].

| Isotope                         | ME (keV) | unc. (keV) | ME <sub>AME2020</sub> (keV) | unc. (keV) | $S_p$ (keV) | unc. (keV) | $S_{2p}$ (keV) | unc. (keV) |
|---------------------------------|----------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| <sup>148</sup> Tb               | -70535   | 12         | -70537                      | 12         | 2467        | 13         | 7995           | 14         |
| <sup>150</sup> Yb*              | -38635   | 45         | -38830#                     | 300#       | 1983        | 205        | 1733           | 46         |
| <sup>151</sup> Er               | -58268   | 15         | -58266                      | 17         | 3611        | 21         | 5152           | 18         |
| <sup>151</sup> Yb*              | -41326   | 106        | -41542                      | 300        | 2124        | 222        | 2162           | 109        |
| <sup>151</sup> Yb <sup>m*</sup> | -40617   | 49         |                             |            |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>151</sup> Lu               | -30105   | 45         | -30300#                     | 300#       | -1241       | 64         | 742            | 205        |
| <sup>151</sup> Lu <sup>m</sup>  | -30048   | 45         | -30244#                     | 300#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>152</sup> Ho               | -63603   | 12         | -63605                      | 13         | 2139        | 13         | 7074           | 14         |
| <sup>152</sup> Tm               | -51695   | 51         | -51720                      | 54         | 716         | 53         | 4327           | 53         |
| <sup>152</sup> Yb*              | -46079   | 44         | -46270                      | 150        | 2596        | 48         | 2825           | 47         |
| <sup>153</sup> Yb*              | -47102   | 46         | -47160#                     | 200#       | 2696        | 68         | 3412           | 48         |
| <sup>153</sup> Lu               | -38184   | 45         | -38375                      | 150        | -606        | 63         | 1990           | 49         |
| <sup>153</sup> Lu <sup>m</sup>  | -38104   | 45         | -38296                      | 150        |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>154</sup> Lu               | -39609   | 48         | -39667#                     | 201#       | -204        | 66         | 2492           | 70         |
| <sup>154</sup> Lu <sup>m</sup>  | -39547   | 48         | -39604#                     | 201#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>155</sup> Yb*              | -50505   | 16         | -50503                      | 17         | 3366        | 21         | 4616           | 18         |
| <sup>156</sup> Tm               | -56831   | 14         | -56834                      | 14         | 1911        | 15         | 6770           | 16         |
| <sup>156</sup> Lu               | -43675   | 51         | -43700                      | 54         | 459         | 53         | 3825           | 53         |
| <sup>156</sup> Hf               | -37628   | 44         | -37820                      | 150        | 2371        | 48         | 2273           | 47         |
| <sup>156</sup> Hf <sup>m</sup>  | -35669   | 44         | -35861                      | 150        |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>157</sup> Tm               | -58716   | 24         | -58709                      | 28         | 1793        | 34         | 7253           | 30         |
| <sup>157</sup> Hf               | -38797   | 46         | -38855#                     | 200#       | 2412        | 68         | 2871           | 48         |
| <sup>157</sup> Ta               | -29404   | 45         | -29596                      | 150        | -935        | 63         | 1437           | 49         |
| <sup>157</sup> Ta <sup>m</sup>  | -29382   | 45         | -29574                      | 150        |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>157</sup> Ta <sup>n</sup>  | -27811   | 45         | -28003                      | 150        |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>158</sup> Ta               | -31061   | 48         | -31118#                     | 201#       | -448        | 66         | 1964           | 70         |
| <sup>158</sup> Ta <sup>m</sup>  | -30919   | 48         | -30977#                     | 201#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>158</sup> Ta <sup>n</sup>  | -28253   | 49         | -28311#                     | 201#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>159</sup> Hf               | -42855   | 16         | -42853                      | 17         | 2931        | 22         | 4012           | 19         |
| <sup>160</sup> Ta               | -35799   | 51         | -35824                      | 54         | 233         | 53         | 3164           | 53         |
| <sup>160</sup> W                | -29137   | 44         | -29329                      | 150        | 1987        | 48         | 1613           | 47         |
| <sup>161</sup> W                | -30449   | 46         | -30507#                     | 200#       | 1940        | 69         | 2178           | 49         |
| <sup>161</sup> Re               | -20651   | 44         | -20843                      | 150        | -1197       | 62         | 790            | 48         |
| <sup>161</sup> Re <sup>m</sup>  | -20527   | 44         | -20719                      | 150        |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>162</sup> Re               | -22395   | 47         | -22453#                     | 201#       | -765        | 66         | 1175           | 70         |
| <sup>162</sup> Re <sup>m</sup>  | -22220   | 48         | -22278#                     | 201#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>163</sup> W                | -34910   | 58         | -34908                      | 58         | 2418        | 86         | 3172           | 63         |
| <sup>164</sup> Re               | -27447   | 51         | -27472                      | 55         | -174        | 78         | 2244           | 81         |
| <sup>164</sup> Os               | -20233   | 44         | -20425                      | 150        | 1519        | 48         | 811            | 48         |
| <sup>165</sup> Os               | -21689   | 46         | -21747#                     | 200#       | 1531        | 69         | 1357           | 74         |
| <sup>165</sup> Ir               | -11403#  | 67#        | -11595#                     | 158#       | -1541       | 80         | -21            | 70         |
| <sup>165</sup> Ir <sup>m</sup>  | -11223   | 45         | -11415                      | 150        |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>166</sup> Ir               | -13248   | 47         | -13306#                     | 201#       | -1152       | 66         | 379            | 70         |
| <sup>166</sup> Ir <sup>m</sup>  | -13077   | 48         | -13134#                     | 201#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>167</sup> Os               | -26501   | 81         | -26499                      | 81         | 1952        | 120        | 2217           | 85         |
| <sup>168</sup> Ir               | -18641   | 52         | -18666                      | 55         | -571        | 96         | 1382           | 102        |
| <sup>168</sup> Pt               | -10818   | 44         | -11010                      | 150        | 1035        | 48         | -35            | 48         |
| <sup>169</sup> Pt               | -12407   | 47         | -21464#                     | 200#       | 1054        | 70         | 484            | 93         |
| <sup>170</sup> Au               | -3646    | 48         | -3703#                      | 201#       | -1472       | 67         | -417           | 71         |
| <sup>170</sup> Au <sup>m</sup>  | -3366    | 47         | -3424#                      | 201#       |             |            |                |            |
| <sup>171</sup> Pt               | -17469   | 81         | -17467                      | 81         | 1575        | 130        | 1323           | 85         |
| <sup>172</sup> Au               | -9293    | 53         | -9318                       | 56         | -886        | 97         | 689            | 115        |
| <sup>172</sup> Hg               | -869     | 45         | -1061                       | 150        | 596         | 49         | -852           | 48         |
| <sup>173</sup> Hg               | -2604    | 47         | -2661#                      | 201#       | 600         | 71         | -287           | 93         |
| <sup>175</sup> Hg               | -7971    | 81         | -7969                       | 81         | 1202        | 130        | 613            | 103        |
| <sup>176</sup> Tl               | 583      | 83         | 585                         | 83         | -1265       | 116        | -63            | 131        |
| <sup>179</sup> Pb               | 2050     | 81         | 2052                        | 81         | 626         | 131        | -247           | 117        |

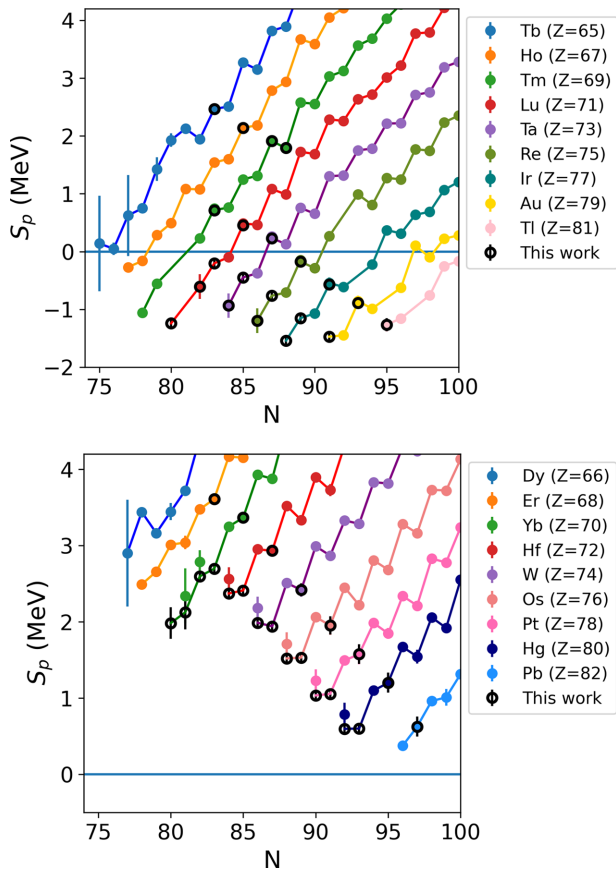


FIG. 3. One-proton separation energy as a function of neutron number  $N$  for odd- $Z$  nuclei (top) and even- $Z$  ones (bottom). The results of this work are represented with black data points while all other data points were calculated using the AME2020. All the data points have been calculated using existent or new masses and Eq. (3).

required to remove one proton from the nucleus and its trend can be seen in Fig. 3 for several isotopic chains. The top of Fig. 3 shows odd- $Z$  nuclides while the bottom contains the even- $Z$  ones. The results of this work are represented in black empty circles, while the colored data-points represent one-proton separation energies calculated from AME2020 masses [15].

The two-proton separation energy,  $S_{2p}$ , defined in Eq. (4), expresses the energy associated with the emission of two protons from the nuclide ( $Z, A$ ). Positive two proton separation energy indicates bound nuclei, while negative two proton separation energy reveals the two-proton unbound nuclei. The trend of the two-proton separation energy as a function of the neutron number  $N$  is plotted in Fig. 4. Values calculated from AME2020 are depicted in colored data points connected with solid lines while the results of this work are depicted in black data points. Isotopes with  $S_{2p} < 0$  are unbound to two-proton decay and thus, potential two-proton emitters provided they have  $S_p > 0$ .

Figure 5 places the newly calculated masses on the nuclear chart. Those that have  $S_{2p} > 0$  are depicted in red while those with  $S_{2p} < 0$  are depicted in blue. In total, we have found seven nuclei whose  $S_{2p}$  value is equal or smaller than zero.

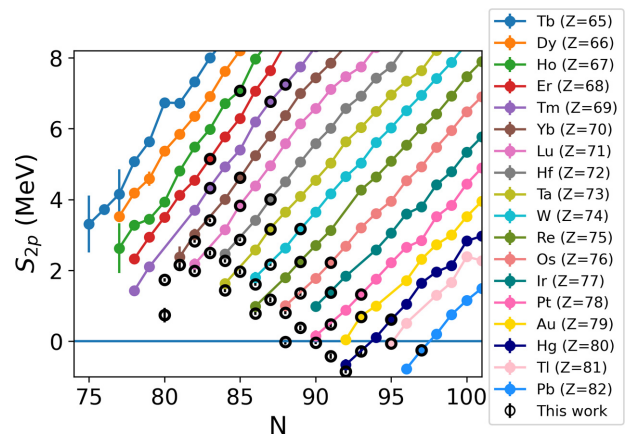


FIG. 4. Two-proton separation energy as a function of neutron number  $N$  for elements of atomic numbers  $Z = 65-82$ . The results of this work are represented with black data points while all other data points were calculated using the AME2020.

Out of these,  $^{173}\text{Hg}$ ,  $^{170}\text{Au}$ ,  $^{165}\text{Ir}$  are newly found two-proton unbound nuclei that were not measured before this work. Among the other two-proton unbound nuclides, we were able to reduce the mass uncertainties of  $^{172}\text{Hg}$  and  $^{168}\text{Pt}$  by a factor of 3. As can be seen on the right side of Fig. 5, each color represents a range of two-proton separation energies, thus giving a perspective of the shore and the ‘‘littoral shallow’’ in the region.

The nuclei with  $S_{2p} < 0$  and  $S_p > 0$  are  $^{172,173}\text{Hg}$ ,  $^{168}\text{Pt}$ , and  $^{179}\text{Pb}$ , with respective half-lives 231(9)  $\mu\text{s}$  [22], 0.80(8) ms [23], 2.02(10) ms [24–27], and  $3.5^{+1.4}_{-0.8}$  ms [28]. For all of them,  $\alpha$  decays have been observed and their  $\alpha$  decay branching ratios are given to be almost 100%. Though these nuclei could potentially be candidates for two-proton emission, their large Coulomb barrier would require significantly larger  $Q$  values than those of known two-proton emitters. Given that the  $Q_{2p}$  values calculated in this work are comparable with those of light two-proton emitters, although there is a finite probability for  $2p$  decay, the partial half-life is too long for the decay to be experimentally observable.

The position of the drip-line as well as masses and separation energies are some of the most common quantities derived from nuclear theory calculations. It has also been repeatedly observed that different nuclear models tend to disagree by several MeV depending on their nature or their fitted parameters [1]. Experimental efforts and works, like the present one, can support and benchmark theories as well as point towards required improvements.

In the region of medium-heavy, midshell nuclei, nuclear theory calculations are performed using the mean-field framework [31]. In this framework there are two dominant branches; one that uses Skyrme interactions [32] and one that employs the Gogny force [30]. In both cases, the Hartree-Fock-Bogoliubov equations are numerically solved to provide nuclear properties such as binding energies and nuclear charge radii.

However, mean-field approaches, both in the framework of Skyrme interactions and that of Gogny forces, struggle

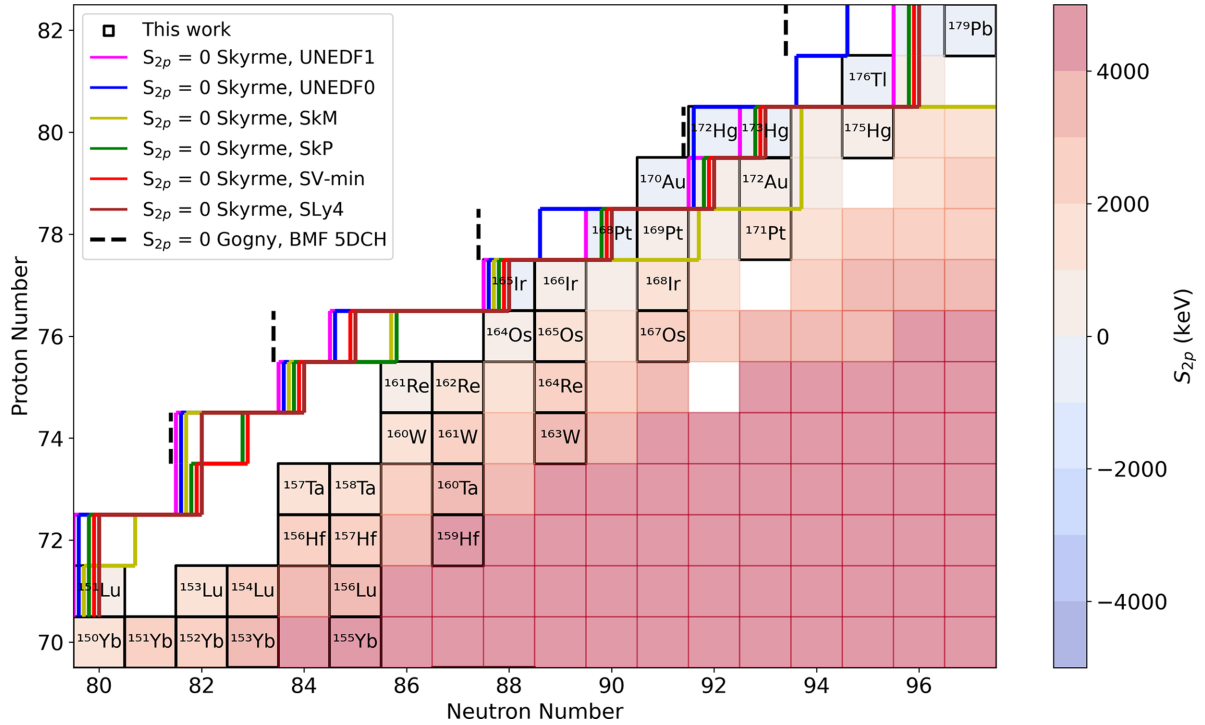


FIG. 5. Nuclear chart plot of the region between Yb and Pb. The color code indicates the two proton separation energies of the isotopes from the latest Atomic Mass Evaluation and from this work. The dark squares indicate isotopes the masses of which were determined in this work. The theoretical two-proton driplines [1,29,30] are plotted with solid and dashed lines.

to capture exotic phenomena such as deformation, while at times over- or mispredict closed shells [17]. To overcome this limitation, corrections beyond the mean field have been implemented to the model Hamiltonians. The beyond the mean-field version of the Skyrme-interaction models is encapsulated in the UNEDF0 and UNEDF1 parametrizations [32] while for the Gogny forces, the beyond mean-field approach is achieved in the CHFB+5DCH implementation [30].

We used the aforementioned models as well as other existent models based on the Skyrme interaction (SkMc[33], SkPc[34], SLy4c[35], SV-minc[36]), to locate the position of the two-proton dripline between  $Z = 70$ – $82$  and compared it to our calculated two-proton dripline. The positions of the theoretical driplines are indicated with solid and dashed lines in Fig. 5. Among the models, SkM seems to underpredict stability while the opposite is true for the Gogny BMF 5DCH model and the Skyrme UNEDF0.

#### IV. THOMAS-EHRMAN SHIFTS

In the early 1950s, Thomas [12] and Ehrman [13] discovered that there is a shift in the expected Coulomb energies between  $^{13}\text{C}$  and  $^{13}\text{N}$ . This shift was later named after them and it has been repeatedly measured in light proton-unbound systems [11]. Its origin comes from the fact that when a proton is loosely bound to the nucleus, the overlap of its wave function and that of the rest of the nucleus is reduced and therefore the Coulomb repulsion is weaker. It has also been found that this effect is more prominent in light nuclei where the Coulomb barrier is small and for nuclei with low angular

momentum quantum numbers where the centrifugal potential is not too strong [11]. The Thomas-Ehrman shift is thought to (partially) explain the reduced  $N = 8$  shell effect in the four-proton-unbound  $^{18}\text{Mg}$  result [8].

In the low-mass region of the nuclear chart, the study of Thomas-Ehrman shifts has focused on using mirror nuclei. However, for  $Z > 50$  no known mirror nuclei exist. Novikov *et al.* [10] therefore took a different approach, assuming if there is a shift in the Coulomb energies of the proton-unbound nuclei, the trend of one-proton separation energy should change across the dripline. Using the binding energy as phenomenologically described by the semiempirical mass formula

$$\text{BE} = \alpha_V A - \alpha_S A^{2/3} - \alpha_C \frac{Z(Z-1)}{A^{1/3}} \quad (8)$$

$$- \alpha_A \frac{(N-Z)^2}{A} + \delta(N, Z),$$

they expressed the one-proton separation energy as

$$S_p = \alpha + \beta A^{-1/3} + \gamma A^{-1}, \quad (9)$$

where  $\alpha, \beta, \gamma$  are fit parameters. In their approach they only fitted the bound nuclei close to the proton drip-line, extrapolated and looked for deviations between the extrapolated line and the measured unbound nuclei.

In this work, starting from the linearity of  $S_p$  as a function of  $A$  when there are no significant changes in nuclear structure (shell closures, deformation, etc.), we choose to simplify the

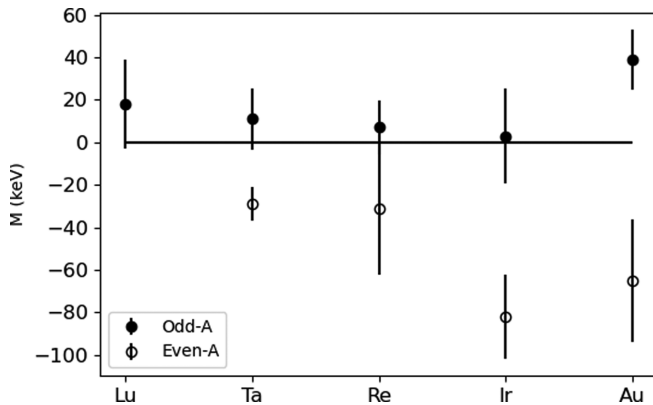


FIG. 6. Plot of the metric  $M$  for different isotopic chains. All values above zero correspond to fits for odd- $A$  nuclei while all the ones below zero correspond to even- $A$  ones. For the linear fit of even- $A$  Ta, Ir, and Au, only two  $S_p$  values were available for each case.

fit further and we define our fitting function as

$$S_p = aA + b, \quad (10)$$

where  $a, b$  are the fit parameters. Using the PYTHON least-square Statsmodels module [37], we fit Eq. (10) separately for proton-bound and proton-unbound nuclides. After obtaining the slopes  $a$  and their uncertainty  $\delta a$  for the bound and unbound data sets, we define a metric indicating a possible kink between proton-bound and proton-unbound fitted lines that would reveal a Thomas-Ehrman shift:

$$M = a_+ - a_-, \quad (11)$$

where  $a_+$  and  $a_-$  are the slopes of the proton-bound and proton-unbound nuclides, respectively.

From the data obtained in this work we only investigated the existence of Thomas-Ehrman shifts in odd- $Z$  nuclei since their one-proton drip-line is within reach. We also used one-proton separation energies calculated in this work and included AME2020 values when needed.

The results can be seen in Fig. 6 for each of the odd- $Z$  elements; Lu, Ta, Re, Ir, and Au. The error bars correspond to the uncertainties  $\delta M_+$  and  $\delta M_-$  added quadratically. For Lu there is no result for even- $A$  nuclei because there is only one Lu isotope with known  $S_p$  and therefore there are insufficient data points for a fit. In addition, we note that the results for

even- $A$  Ta, Ir, and Au isotopes are based on a two-point linear fit as in each of the three cases there are only two proton-unbound isotopes available.

Based on the results depicted in Fig. 6, there is a slight but noticeable ( $2\sigma$ ) discrepancy in the slope of proton-bound and proton-unbound odd- $A$  Au isotopes, which could be a result of a Thomas-Ehrman shift. In addition, the presence of Thomas-Ehrman shifts for Au nuclei agrees with the expectation that odd- $A$ , proton-unbound Au isotopes with low spin ( $J^\pi = 1/2^+$ ) are more likely to show shifts compared to higher spin isotopes like the odd- $A$ , proton-unbound Lu isotopes ( $J^\pi = 11/2^-$ ) or the even- $A$  Re isotopes ( $J^\pi = 2^-$ ). However, measurements of more proton-unbound isotopes of the mentioned species are required for a conclusive result.

## V. CONCLUSION

We used mass measurements of  $^{150-157}\text{Yb}$  isotopes as anchor points for long decay chains which resulted in 11 new ground state mass values as well as improvements of nine other ground state masses by at least a factor of 2. Exploring the mass surface by calculating the two-proton separation energies from the determined masses, we located the two-proton drip-line between  $Z = 77$  and 82, and show that the newly determined  $^{168}\text{Pt}$ ,  $^{172,173}\text{Hg}$ , and  $^{179}\text{Pb}$  could be candidates for two-proton emission, although the partial half-lives are likely too long, thus making  $\alpha$  decay the most promising decay type. Comparison with theoretical works shows that Skyrme interactions tend to predict the two proton drip-line with relative accuracy, for the region of interest without taking into consideration theoretical uncertainties. Finally, we used the calculated masses to determine one-proton separation energies and investigated the presence of Thomas-Ehrman shifts in the odd- $Z$  nuclei of this work, finding a possible occurrence in the odd- $A$ , proton-unbound Au isotopes although more data on proton-unbound nuclei are needed before drawing a definite result.

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- Correction:* A typographical error in a value given in the fifth row of the second column of Table I has been fixed.