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### Neutron stars as axion laboratories

*Harnessing the power of the magnetosphere*

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# Publications

THIS THESIS IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS:

1. Samuel J. Witte, **Dion Noordhuis**, Thomas D. P. Edwards, and Christoph Weniger, *Axion-photon conversion in neutron star magnetospheres: The role of the plasma in the Goldreich-Julian model*, [Physical Review D \*\*104\*\* \(2021\)](#), [arXiv:2104.07670](#).

Presented in Chapter 2.

*SJW led the analysis and writing of the paper. DN performed parts of the theoretical analysis, and contributed through reviewing the code and calculations. All authors contributed through scientific ideas, planning, and editing the manuscript.*

2. **Dion Noordhuis**, Anirudh Prabhu, Samuel J. Witte, Alexander Y. Chen, Fábio Cruz, and Christoph Weniger, *Novel constraints on axions produced in pulsar polar-cap cascades*, [Physical Review Letters \*\*131\*\* \(2023\)](#), [arXiv:2209.09917](#).

Presented in Chapter 3.

*DN, AP, and SJW led the analysis and writing of the paper; DN hereby focused on the radio flux calculations, and AP and SJW on the development of the semi-analytic model. The PIC simulation was previously performed by AYC and FC. The main ideas were conceptualized by DN, AP, and SJW, with contributions from AYC and CW (who also helped in writing the manuscript).*

3. **Dion Noordhuis**, Anirudh Prabhu, Christoph Weniger, and Samuel J. Witte, *Axion clouds around neutron stars*, accepted for publication in [Physical Review X](#), [arXiv:2307.11811](#).

Presented in Chapter 4.

*DN led the analysis and writing of the paper. All authors contributed through scientific ideas, planning, and editing the manuscript.*

4. Estanis Utrilla Ginés, **Dion Noordhuis**, Christoph Weniger, and Samuel J. Witte, *Numerical analysis of resonant axion-photon mixing: Part I*, submitted to Physical Review D, [arXiv:2405.08865](https://arxiv.org/abs/2405.08865).

Presented in Chapter 5.

*EUG performed the simulations, under supervision of DN and SJW. DN furthermore carried out the theoretical calculations. All authors contributed through scientific ideas, planning, and editing the manuscript.*

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# Samenvatting

In de wereld van de natuurkunde wordt de term ‘materie’ gebruikt om collectief te verwijzen naar elk fysiek object dat we kunnen waarnemen, van de kleinste atomen tot de massiefste sterren. De bouwstenen van materie zijn elementaire (*d.w.z.* ondeelbare) deeltjes, zoals quarks en elektronen, die elkaar beïnvloeden via de vier bekende fundamentele krachten: zwaartekracht, elektromagnetisme, zwakke kernkracht, en sterke kernkracht. Dit netwerk van deeltjes en hun interacties is samengevat in een theorie die bekendstaat als het standaardmodel van de deeltjesfysica, dat breed wordt ondersteund door zowel theoretisch als experimenteel bewijs. Ondanks zijn successen is het standaardmodel echter geen complete theorie, omdat het niet in staat is om verschillende belangrijke verschijnselen te verklaren.

Een voorbeeld van zo’n verschijnsel is de implicatie van ontbrekende massa in het universum. Volgens uitvoerig gravitationeel bewijs is ongeveer 85% van de totale materie-inhoud van het universum niet direct waarneembaar. Deze ongeziene materie, ‘donkere materie’ genaamd, oefent zwaartekracht uit op zichtbare materie en licht, maar lijkt verder geen straling te produceren en geen interacties te hebben die wij momenteel kunnen detecteren. Hoewel dus ogenschijnlijk onzichtbaar, speelt donkere materie een cruciale rol in het vormgeven van de structuur van het heelal en heeft het aanzienlijke invloed op de vorming en het gedrag van sterrenstelsels en clusters van sterrenstelsels. Het begrijpen van de aard van donkere materie is een van de grootste uitdagingen in de moderne astrofysica en kosmologie, waarbij onderzoekers vele verschillende methodes hanteren om de mysterieuze eigenschappen ervan te onthullen.

De meeste modellen suggereren dat donkere materie een onontdekt deeltje is, gekenmerkt door zwakke interacties, productie in het vroege universum, en een lange levensduur. Onder de vele voorgestelde kandidaten springen axionen eruit als bijzonder goed gemotiveerd. Deze hypothetische deeltjes komen op natuurlijke wijze naar voren in uitbreidingen van het standaardmodel en kunnen, naast dat ze een ideale donkeremateriekandidaat zijn, een oplossing bieden voor andere belangrijke openstaande vraagstukken binnen de natuurkunde. Axionen zijn bijvoorbeeld oorspronkelijk bedacht om het zogenaamde ‘sterke CP-probleem’ op te lossen, een vraagstuk dat de theorie van de sterke interacties betreft en gaat over waarom de sterke kernkracht onnodig de gecombineerde symmetrie van ladingconjugatie en pariteit lijkt te behouden.



Het detecteren van axionen vormt helaas, net als bij andere kandidaten voor donkere materie, een formidabele uitdaging. Niettemin is er de afgelopen jaren een groeiende interesse ontstaan in het onderzoek naar axionen. Natuurkundigen ontwikkelen en bouwen steeds meer detectoren op aarde, specifiek gericht op het meten van axionen, en ze ontwerpen ook steeds vaker nieuwe strategieën om axionen indirect te observeren door hun invloed op astrofysische omgevingen te analyseren. Een voorbeeld van deze laatste aanpak is de moderne inspanning om axion-fotoninteracties te bestuderen in de omgeving rond neutronensterren, bekend als de magnetosfeer, waar het omringende plasma en krachtige magnetische veld de vereiste omstandigheden kunnen bieden om de zwakke kracht van axioninteracties te overwinnen.

In dit proefschrift, getiteld *Neutron stars as axion laboratories: Harnessing the power of the magnetosphere*, streven we ernaar om het ingewikkelde samenspel tussen het grote, in de vorm van neutronensterren, en het kleine, in de vorm van axionen, te begrijpen. Zoals hierboven vermeld, zijn axionen een belangrijke kandidaat voor nieuwe natuurkunde buiten het standaardmodel, en neutronensterren met hun bijbehorende magnetosfeer bieden ideale omgevingen voor het bestuderen van deze ongrijpbare deeltjes. Twee mechanismen zijn geïdentificeerd als bijzonder veelbelovend: resonante axion-fotonmenging en axionproductie via vacuümregio's – deze vormen dan ook het fundament waarop dit proefschrift is gebouwd. Resonante axion-fotonmenging verwijst naar de conversie van axionen naar fotonen, en vice versa, op plaatsen waar de viermomenta van beide deeltjes gelijk zijn. Dit proces wordt vergemakkelijkt binnen de magnetosfeer door de combinatie van plasma en een magnetisch veld. Axionproductie via vacuümregio's verwijst naar de creatie van axionen in gelokaliseerde gebieden van de magnetosfeer, ideaal geschikt voor dit doel vanwege de aanwezigheid van oscillerende elektromagnetische velden. Het onderzoek dat hier wordt gepresenteerd, vertegenwoordigt een stap voorwaarts in het begrijpen van de fenomenologie en impact van deze mechanismen, en daarmee in het verhelderen van het gecombineerde systeem van axionen en de magnetosfeer van neutronensterren. Uiteindelijk hoop ik dat dit ook kan bijdragen aan de ontdekking van axionen.

In **Hoofdstuk 2** introduceren we een end-to-end-analyseframework dat in staat is om de fotonflux te berekenen die wordt geproduceerd via de resonante conversie van donkerematerie-axionen in de magnetosferen van neutronensterren. Dit framework maakt gebruik van een geavanceerd auto-differentiatie ray-tracingalgoritme, waardoor de posities van axionen en fotonen nauwkeurig kunnen worden gevolgd. Cruciaal hierbij is dat we rekening houden met de complexe aard van het magnetosferische plasma, wat essentieel is voor het bepalen van zowel de banen van de fotonen als de locaties van de conversiepunten. Met deze aanpak richten we ons op belangrijke onzekerheden met betrekking tot de invloed van de magnetosfeer op signaalberekeningen, wat bijdraagt aan een aanzienlijke verbetering in hun betrouwbaarheid. Onze resultaten laten zien dat, onder realistische keuzes van parameters, resonante menging van

donkerematerie-axionen een signaal genereert dat gekenmerkt wordt door sterke anisotropie, tijdsafhankelijkheid, en een grotere lijnbreedte dan voorheen verwacht.

In **Hoofdstuk 3** verschuiven we onze focus naar de analyse van axionen die lokaal worden gecreëerd binnen de vacuümregio's van neutronensterren. We ontwikkelen een framework dat de berekening mogelijk maakt van de initiële axionspectra, de daaropvolgende banen van deze axionen door de magnetosfeer, hun resonante menging met fotonen, en de resulterende radio-emissie. De eerste van deze stappen wordt op twee manieren uitgevoerd: door gebruik te maken van ofwel een zelf ontworpen semi-analytisch model, of van particle-in-cell-simulaties uit een eerdere studie. De resultaten van deze twee methoden komen goed overeen, wat de robuustheid van ons framework ten opzichte van onzekerheden onderstreept. Het uiteindelijke radiosignaal wordt bepaald met behulp van een aangepaste versie van het ray-tracingalgoritme dat in Hoofdstuk 2 is geïntroduceerd. Door ons te concentreren op de relativistische axionpopulatie, tonen we aan dat deze, in tegenstelling tot donkerematerie-axionen, een breed spectrum genereert wanneer ze resonant mengt. Vervolgens vergelijken we onze signaalvoorspellingen met waarnemingen van 27 nabijgelegen pulsars, waarbij we de sterkste huidige limieten op de axion-fotonkoppeling in het massabereik  $m_a \simeq 10^{-8} - 10^{-5}$  eV vaststellen. Deze limieten zijn aangeduid als 'Pulsars' in Figuur 1.5.

In **Hoofdstuk 4** onderzoeken we de gevolgen van de grote niet-relativistische axionpopulatie die ook wordt geproduceerd via vacuümregio's. Dergelijke axionen kunnen niet ontsnappen aan de zwaartekracht van een neutronenster, waardoor zij zich rond de ster ophopen en zo een 'axionwolk' vormen. Het bestaan van axionwolken vereist geen aannames buiten een axion met een geschikte massa dat koppelt aan elektromagnetisme, en daarom wordt verwacht dat ze een veelvoorkomend fenomeen zijn wanneer de axionmassa ongeveer van de orde  $m_a \simeq 10^{-9} - 10^{-4}$  eV is, zelfs als de axion-fotonkoppeling zwak is. We bestuderen de vorming, kenmerken, en evolutie van axionwolken, waarbij we laten zien dat ze enorme dichtheden kunnen bereiken voor een breed scala aan parameters. Daarnaast analyseren we mogelijke mechanismen voor energiedissipatie, en identificeren resonante axion-fotonmenging als de belangrijkste kandidaat voor het genereren van waarneembare effecten. Deze studie vertegenwoordigt het eerste onderzoek naar deze categorie van axionwolken, en opent een nieuw interdisciplinair veld met grote potentie voor axiononderzoek.

Ten slotte, in **Hoofdstuk 5**, kijken we af van ons eerdere brede perspectief en richten we ons specifiek op axion-fotonmenging. Hoewel dit proces relatief goed begrepen is in geïdealiseerde scenario's, vormt het een uitdagende taak om de vergelijkingen die axion-fotonmenging beschrijven volledig op te lossen in sterk niet-uniforme achtergronden zoals de magnetosfeer van een neutronenster. Meerdere theoretische studies hebben zich de afgelopen jaren op dit probleem gericht, maar ondanks het ogenschijnlijk gebruik van dezelfde aannames, hebben deze tot verschillende resultaten geleid. Om deze discrepantie aan te pakken, behandelen we het probleem van axion-fotonmenging met numerieke methoden, waarbij we een resultaat vinden dat overeenstemt met

slechts een van de gepubliceerde theoretische oplossingen. Dit werk, hoewel nog niet gericht op sterk niet-uniforme achtergronden, dient als startpunt voor een bredere verkenning van axion-fotonmenging in complexe astrofysische omgevingen. Dit zal een cruciale rol spelen bij het verbeteren van de nauwkeurigheid van signaalberekeningen voor indirecte axion-zoektochten.