Quasiparticle Chirality in Epitaxial Graphene Probed at the Nanometer Scale

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(Received 27 May 2008; published 14 November 2008)

Graphene exhibits unconventional two-dimensional electronic properties resulting from the symmetry of its quasiparticles, which leads to the concepts of pseudospin and electronic chirality. Here, we report that scanning tunneling microscopy can be used to probe these unique symmetry properties at the nanometer scale. They are reflected in the quantum interference pattern resulting from elastic scattering off impurities, and they can be directly read from its fast Fourier transform. Our data, complemented by theoretical calculations, demonstrate that the pseudospin and the electronic chirality in epitaxial graphene on SiC(0001) correspond to the ones predicted for ideal graphene.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.101.206802 PACS numbers: 73.20.–r, 68.37.Ef, 72.10.Fk

Graphene, one single layer of carbon atoms packed in a honeycomb structure, has two identical carbon atoms in each unit cell and thus two equivalent atom sublattices. This gives rise to an extra degree of freedom absent in conventional two-dimensional (2D) systems, and leads to exceptional electronic properties. The major consequence of the honeycomb structure is that the low energy quasiparticles of graphene are described by a Dirac-like Hamiltonian. The energy spectrum is thus linear, and particles of graphene are described by a Dirac-like Hamiltonian. The energy spectrum is thus linear, and con-

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mons chosen to obtain a mixed surface with a similar coverage of monolayer and bilayer (with Bernal stacking) terraces, ~50 nm wide. A carbon layer is present at the interface between graphene and the SiC. This layer is strongly bound to the substrate, and acts as a buffer layer with negligible interactions with the graphene layers [11]. Although not metallic, the carbon buffer layer has electronic states that give a significant contribution to the STM images [10,12]. Our experiments were done using a homemade microscope operating at 4 K in ultrahigh vacuum. High bias STM images, as shown in Fig. 1(a), allow discriminating monolayer from bilayer graphene terraces due to the different interface states contribution [10].

Two groups have reported angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy (ARPES) measurements on epitaxial graphene layers on SiC(0001). They demonstrate that the graphene layers are electron doped. The measured difference between the Fermi energy (EF) and the Dirac energy (E_D) is ~0.45 eV for a monolayer and ~0.30 eV for a bilayer [13–15]. For graphene monolayer, a low energy linear dispersion has been found, a fingerprint of Dirac-like fermions [13,14]. However, different results are obtained...
by the two groups concerning the crossing of the bands: An energy gap of 0.25 eV is found at the Dirac point by only one of the groups [14]. It has been proposed by the authors that the gap arises from a substrate-induced breaking of the sublattice symmetry of graphene. ARPES also shows that the Fermi surfaces (FSs) of monolayer and bilayer graphene on SiC(0001) are essentially identical [15,16]. They consist of two tiny circular pockets, of radius 50 nm, centered on the state of the Brillouin zone [18]. In a 2D system such as graphene, low bias images probe the quantum interferences (QIs) arising from elastic scattering of surface quasiparticles at static defects [18]. Such QIs are related to the Friedel oscillations in 2D metals. In a simple picture, any impurity scattering between two states \( \vec{k} \) and \( \vec{k}' \) of the FS should give rise to LDOS spatial modulations with wave vector \( \vec{q} = \vec{k}' - \vec{k} \), with a scattering probability depending on the topology of the FS. For a circular FS of radius \( k_F \), scattering between states \( \vec{k}_F \) and states—\( k_F \) (termed backscattering in the following) are the most efficient processes due to enhanced phase space, resulting in LDOS modulations with wave vector \( 2k_F \) [18,19].

For the FS sketched in Fig. 1(b), and depending on the impurity potentials present in the system, we may expect elastic electron scattering processes between the non-equivalent Dirac cones at \( K \) and \( K' \) (i.e., intervalley scattering) as depicted in Fig. 1(c), together with elastic scattering processes between states located on the same Dirac cone (i.e., intravalley scattering). Figure 1(d) is a constant current STM image taken at +2 mV that includes two adjacent graphene monolayer and bilayer terraces. A striking difference is measured in the LDOS patterns between the left and right terraces. A clear long-range modulation, of wavelength \( 5.2 \pm 0.3 \) nm, is found on the graphene bilayer terrace. This modulation has already been reported by Rutter et al. [12], and is attributed to quantum interferences of wave vector \( 2q_F \) due to intravalley backscattering between states \( q_F \) and states \( -q_F \) within one single pocket [Fig. 1(f)]. Surprisingly, we do not find such LDOS modulation on the monolayer, which is puzzling if we keep in mind that the two systems have almost the same FS.

The lack of LDOS modulation of wave vector \( 2q_F \) for the monolayer implies that QIs associated with intravalley backscattering are virtually absent. It has been reported that wave function symmetries may lead to selection rules that can prevent QIs, for instance, in systems with strong spin-orbit coupling where the electronic spin governs the elastic scattering processes [20,21]. In the present case, the absence of QIs in graphene monolayer is associated to the pseudospin instead of real spin. Intuitively, this is because the pseudospin of the backscattered wave is opposite to that of the incident wave so that their overlap should be zero [see Fig. 1(e)]. For a scattering potential with range larger than the C-C distance (which leads to scattering without pseudospin-flip), it has been shown that intravalley backscattering processes and the associated QIs are strictly forbidden in monolayer graphene [22,23]. On the contrary, the electronic chirality does not prevent intravalley backscattering in bilayer graphene [Fig. 1(f)] [24].

For both monolayer and bilayer epitaxial graphene on SiC(0001), previous STM experiments have reported that atomic-size impurities give rise to short-wavelength modulations of the LDOS, associated with intervalley scattering [10,12]. According to Ando et al. [22], such impurities, acting as short-range potentials, should also allow intravalley backscattering, which raises the question of possible...
QIs of wave vector $2q_F$. Recent theoretical studies show that for a general impurity potential, LDOS modulations with wave vector $2q_F$ should exist for graphene monolayer, but they should be strongly attenuated [25–27], with a $1/r^2$ decay law instead of the $1/r$ law found in conventional 2D systems. On the other hand, a $1/r$ decay law is obtained for the QIs due to intravalley backscattering in a graphene bilayer, and also for the QIs due to intervalley scattering for both monolayer and bilayer graphene. In reference [25], one of us showed that the $1/r^2$ decay law should have a clear impact on the 2D Fourier transform (FT) of the LDOS modulations: while on bilayer graphene, the efficiency of intravalley backscattering should give rise to a central ring of radius $2q_F$ in the FT map similar to the one observed for conventional 2D systems; the strong attenuation of intravalley backscattering on monolayer graphene should generate a FT image with no central ring [25].

In the following, we present high resolution fast Fourier transform (FFT) of STM images recorded at low sample bias on 50 nm wide graphene terraces. We first show the real-space images, for graphene monolayer [Fig. 2(a)] and graphene bilayer [Fig. 2(b)]. Note that both images exhibit a triangular pattern of periodicity $\sim 1.9$ nm which is related to the interface reconstruction [10,12], and which appears as a sextuplet of bright spots in the corresponding FFT images [Figs. 2(c) and 2(d)].

The central region of the FFT in Figs. 2(c) and 2(d) is related to intravalley scattering: a clear ringlike feature of average radius 1.2 nm$^{-1}$ is found for the bilayer [Figs. 2(d) and 2(g)]. This radius value is in agreement with the value given in Ref. [12], and with the $2q_F$ value derived from ARPES [13,14]. On the monolayer terrace, no central ring is found [Figs. 2(c) and 2(e)], despite the unprecedented momentum resolution obtained here. This has been checked on many different monolayer terraces (see also the EPAPS document [28]), and we conclude that the result is robust and systematic. As discussed above, pseudospin and electronic chirality are the key parameters for the absence (presence) of the central ring in the FFT image of monolayer (bilayer) graphene.

In the high frequency regions of the FFTs of Figs. 2(c) and 2(d), we find six outer pockets with ringlike shapes centered at $K(K')$ points. They result from intervalley scattering, associated to real space LDOS modulations with a $(\sqrt{3} \times \sqrt{3})R30^\circ$ periodicity with respect to graphene [10,12]. As shown in Figs. 2(f) and 2(h), the intensity of the high frequency rings in the FFT is not isotropic. The anisotropy is much more pronounced for graphene monolayer, for which a splitting of each ring into two arcs is found [Fig. 2(f)]. This splitting is discussed in more detail in the EPAPS document [28].

The experimental results are compared with $T$-matrix calculation made along the lines of Ref. [25] (see also the EPAPS document [28]). Figure 3(a) is the FT of a calculated LDOS map at $E_F$ for monolayer graphene with $E_D = E_F - 0.45$ eV, in the presence of a single localized impurity. It is clear that no central $2q_F$ ring is generated in this case. This is the signature of LDOS modulations resulting from inefficient intravalley backscattering, and it is the most direct fingerprint of graphene’s pseudospin and chirality [25]. This is in very good agreement with the experimental absence of the central ring [Fig. 2(e)]. Also, the high frequency split rings, resulting from intervalley scattering, are nicely reproduced by the theoretical calculation. The splitting of the rings is another consequence of the quasiparticle chirality [28].

Figure 3(b) is an equivalent map as Fig. 3(a) but for a graphene bilayer, with $E_D = E_F - 0.3$ eV. From ARPES, it is known that the two layers have a different electron density, giving rise to a gap at $E_D$ of about 0.1 eV [15]. The asymmetry between the two layers has been included in the present calculation. Note the appearance of the inner ring of radius $2q_F$, as well as the presence of the outer rings which have no obvious splitting (a faint intensity remains perpendicularly to the $\Gamma K$ and $\Gamma K'$ directions). The agreement with the experimental FFT is excellent.

Finally, we propose the use of STM to check any possible breaking of graphene’s sublattice symmetry. To this
end, we have calculated the FT of the LDOS map for a monolayer with the same parameters as in Fig. 3(a), but including an arbitrary sublattice asymmetry of 0.25 eV, which is the gap value measured by Zhou et al. [14]. The calculation shows a clear inner ring in the FT, corresponding to efficient QIs due to intravalley backscattering [28]. This dramatically illustrates the effect of the asymmetry on the FT-STM data since this ring is absent in the symmetrical case [Fig. 3(a)]. The data of Fig. 3(c) are for a defect on one sublattice, but we found that the shape of the ring depends on the location of the scattering potential [28]. Because of the large size of the images, it is likely that a distribution of defects is present in the experimental data. Calculations indicate that a large sublattice asymmetry (leading to a gap of 0.6 eV) should be readily detected in FT-STM images, but that for a moderate asymmetry [as for Fig. 3(c)], the intensity of the ring could depend on the defect configuration. Since we have taken images in many different surface areas without detecting any ring, we believe that our data are rather consistent with a symmetrical monolayer, although a small asymmetry can not be totally ruled out.

In summary, by analyzing the Fourier transform of low-bias STM images, we have demonstrated that the pseudo-spin and the chirality of epitaxial graphene quasiparticles can be probed directly at the nanometer scale. We show that graphene monolayer on SiC(0001) exhibits the chirality of an ideal graphene sheet. Together with the previous evidence by ARPES of the low energy linear spectrum, a complete assessment of the Dirac nature of the quasiparticles in this system is obtained.

We thank D. Mayou for helpful discussions, F. Hiebel for participating to sample preparation, R. Cox for careful reading of the manuscript, and the French ANR (programme Blanc) for partial financial support of this work. C.B. and I.B. were supported by a Marie Curie action under the Sixth Framework Programme.

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