Photoproduction of the $\omega$ Meson on the Proton at Large Momentum Transfer

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Photoproduction of the ω Meson on the Proton at Large Momentum Transfer


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The differential cross section, $d\sigma/dt$, for $\omega$ meson exclusive photoproduction on the proton above the resonance region ($2.6 < W < 2.9$ GeV) was measured up to a momentum transfer $-t = 5$ GeV$^2$ using the CLAS detector at Jefferson Laboratory. The $\omega$ channel was identified by detecting a proton and $\pi^+$ in the final state and using the missing mass technique. While the low momentum transfer region shows the typical diffractive pattern expected from Pomeron and Reggeon exchange, at large $-t$ the differential cross section has a flat behavior. This feature can be explained by introducing quark interchange processes in addition to the QCD-inspired two-gluon exchange.

In this Letter we report results of the first comprehensive measurement of the cross section for $\omega$ meson photoproduction on protons for $E_\gamma$ between 3.19 and 3.91 GeV over the $-t$ range 0.1–5.0 GeV$^2$. Previous studies at Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron DESY, Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC), and NINA electron synchrotron (NINA) [1–3] are sparse and cover a limited kinematic range of $-t < 1$ GeV$^2$ [1,2] and $-t \sim -t_{\text{max}}$ (4–5 GeV$^2$) [3]. The low momentum transfer data ($-t < 1$ GeV$^2$) show a diffractive behavior that can be interpreted in the framework of the vector meson dominance (VMD) model [4] as the elastic scattering of vector mesons off the proton target. In a more recent approach, this process is also described by the $t$-channel exchange of the Pomeron and the dominating $\pi$ Regge trajectory [5]. Other approaches [6,7] based on effective Lagrangians and inclusion of nucleon resonances as predicted by quark model calculations are able to reproduce the data at lower photon energies. At high $-t$, where the cross section is sensitive to the microscopic details of the interaction, the underlying physics can be described using parton degrees of freedom. The onset of this regime can be tested by a combined analysis of different flavor channels. The recent Jefferson Laboratory (JLab) measurements of $\phi$ [8] and $\rho$ [9] photoproduction cross sections at large momentum transfer show a behavior consistent with a QCD-inspired framework [10–12]. At large $-t$, the small impact parameter ($\sim 1/\sqrt{-t}$) prevents the constituent gluons (quarks) of the exchange from interacting and forming a Pomeron (Reggeon). Because of the dominant $\sigma\pi$ component of the $\phi$, quark exchange is strongly suppressed in this channel by the Okubo-Zweig-Iizuka rule and the two-gluon mechanism dominates [Figs. 1(a) and 1(b)] [5,11,13]. In contrast, the light quark composition of the $\rho$ allows valence quarks to be exchanged between the baryon and the meson states [Fig. 1(c)] [5,12]. The same quark exchange mechanism is predicted to dominate the $\omega$ sector. Complete and detailed measurements of the $\omega$ differential cross section are therefore a stringent test of this conjecture.

The measurement was performed at Jefferson Laboratory with a bremsstrahlung photon beam produced by a continuous electron beam of $E_0 = 4.1$ GeV hitting a gold foil of $10^{-4}$ radiation lengths. A bremsstrahlung tagging system [14], with a photon energy resolution of $0.1\% \ E_0$, was used to tag photons in the energy range from 3–4 GeV. The target cell, a Mylar cylinder of 6 cm in diameter and 18 cm long, was filled with liquid hydrogen at 20.4 K. The high-intensity photon flux ($\sim 4 \times 10^6 \gamma/s$) was continuously monitored during data taking by an $e^+e^-$ pair spectrometer located downstream of the target. The efficiency of this device was determined during dedicated low intensity ($\sim 10^5 \gamma/s$) runs by comparison with a 100% efficient lead-glass total absorption counter. The systematic uncertainty of the photon flux has been estimated to be 5%.

FIG. 1. The Feynman diagrams corresponding to (a) two-gluon exchange from a single quark, (b) two-gluon exchange taking into account quark correlations in the nucleon, and (c) quark exchange.

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The hadrons were detected in CLAS (CEBAF Large Acceptance Spectrometer) [15], a spectrometer with nearly 4π coverage with a toroidal magnetic field (≈ 1 T) generated by six superconducting coils. The field was set to bend the positive particles away from the beam into the acceptance of the detector. Three drift chamber regions allowed tracking of charged particles [16], and time-of-flight (TOF) scintillators were used for hadron identification [17]. The momentum resolution was of the order of a few percent, while the detector geometric acceptance was about 70% for positive hadrons. Low energy negative particles, however, were mainly lost at forward angles because they were bent out of the acceptance. Coincidences between the photon tagger and the CLAS detector (TOFs) triggered the recording of hadronic interactions. From a total of \(10^6\) triggers, \(10^5\) events were identified as \(p\omega\) candidates.

For this analysis we chose the most sizable \(\omega\) decay mode \((\omega \to \pi^+ \pi^- \pi^0,\) branching ratio 88.8\%), requiring detection of both the proton and the \(\pi^+\) in CLAS. The data analysis consisted of two main steps: two-pion background rejection and \(\omega\) yield extraction from the multimeson background. Because of the different dynamics governing the low and the high \(-t\) domains, we divided the data set into two samples corresponding to low \((- t < 1 \text{ GeV}^2\) ) and high \((- t > 1 \text{ GeV}^2\) ) momentum transfer. The analysis procedure was then performed and optimized independently for the two samples.

The two-pion background is dominated by the \(\gamma p \to p\rho^0\) channel since its cross section is 5 times larger than that for \(\gamma p \to p\omega\) for \(E\gamma \sim 3-4 \text{ GeV}\), and the mass of the \(\rho\) meson (770 MeV) is very close to the \(\omega\) mass (783 MeV). Even though the \(\rho\) has a larger width (≈ 150 MeV FWHM) compared to the \(\omega\) (≈ 8 MeV FWHM enlarged to ≈ 55 MeV FWHM by the experimental resolution), the missing mass for the reaction \(\gamma p \to pX\) alone does not allow separation of the two channels. The two-pion background was rejected by requiring that the missing mass for the reaction \(\gamma p \to p\pi^+\pi^-X\) be larger than 0.3 GeV. We estimated that the \(\omega\)'s surviving this cut were around 99%. Figure 2 shows the \((p\pi^+)\) missing mass squared spectrum: the missing \(\pi^-\) peak was easily removed (the hatched area corresponds to the retained events). The small contamination surviving the cut (estimated to be around 5% by the simulations) is spread over a wide proton missing mass interval, and it was reduced to a negligible level in the second step of the analysis. The \(\omega\) yield extraction from the multimeson background was performed on the proton missing mass spectrum by using two different procedures: a Gaussian fit to the \(\omega\) peak and a sideband subtraction.

Both of them rely on the hypothesis of a smooth and continuous background variation from one sideband region to the other. The two methods were not totally independent, but the comparison of their results allowed estimation of the systematic error related to the \(\omega\) identification. The proton missing mass in each \(-t\) bin was fitted to a Gaussian curve (the \(\omega\) peak) plus a fourth order polynomial (the multimeson background). The \(\omega\) yields in each \(-t\) bin were the area under the Gaussian. Figure 3 shows the fitted spectra in a low and high \(-t\) bin. The sideband subtraction procedure allowed extraction of a localized signal over an extended background subtracting the regions on either side of the peak (sidebands) after a proper normalization. The middle region was fixed at 6\(\sigma\) of the Gaussian curve describing the \(\omega\) peak (\(\sigma \sim 24 \text{ MeV}\) ) while the sidebands had a width of 3\(\sigma\) each. The \(\omega\) yield was obtained as the average of the two procedures while the maximum difference, 8%, was used as an estimate of the systematic error.

The CLAS acceptance and reconstruction efficiency were evaluated with Monte Carlo simulations using the event generator of Ref. [18]. This code included the main contributions to the \(p\pi^+\pi^-\) (\(\gamma p \to p\rho^0\), \(\gamma p \to \Delta^{++}\pi^-\), and \(\gamma p \to p\pi^+\pi^-\) in s-wave) and \(p\pi^+\pi^-\pi^0\) final states (\(\gamma p \to p\omega\) and \(\gamma p \to p\pi^+\pi^-\pi^0\) phase space), along
with background reactions with four or more pions. The generated events were processed by a GEANT-based code simulating the CLAS detector, and reconstructed using the same analysis procedure that was applied to the raw data. The acceptance was derived as a function of $E_\gamma$ and the momentum transfer $t$, integrating over the remaining independent variables. To minimize the model dependence in the acceptance calculation, the $\gamma p \rightarrow p \omega$ differential cross section was iteratively determined from the data and implemented in the Monte Carlo code. The final acceptance was derived as a function of the two-gluon exchange contribution underestimates (by an order of magnitude) the experimental cross section. At intermediate momentum transfer, the two-gluon exchange contribution underestimates (by an order of magnitude) the experimental cross section.

The $\omega$ photoproduction cross section as a function of $t$ was extracted in four energy bins in the range $3.19-3.91$ GeV. Data are shown in Figs. 4 and 5: vertical error bars include both the statistical uncertainties (ranging from 2% to 25%) and the overall systematic error (14%).

Assuming an exponential $A e^{Bt}$ behavior in the range $0.1 < -t < 0.5$ GeV$^2$, the coefficient resulting from this experiment, $B = 5.4 \pm 0.6$ GeV$^{-2}$, is consistent with the values $B = 5.1 \pm 1.4$ and $B = 7.1 \pm 1.7$ GeV$^{-2}$ obtained by fitting, respectively, the $E_\gamma = 2.8$ GeV and $E_\gamma = 4.7$ GeV data sets reported in Ref. [2]. Good agreement is also found with existing data at the largest momentum transfer taken at NINA [3] with a bremsstrahlung photon beam and a single arm spectrometer.

Predictions of the QCD-inspired model of Refs. [5,12] are also shown in Fig. 4. Here the Pomeron exchange has been replaced by the exchange of two nonperturbatively dressed gluons (dotted line). The low momentum transfer region is dominated by the pion exchange trajectory exchanges, which gives good agreement up to $-t \sim 1$ GeV$^2$. The $\pi$ exchange gives a strong contribution because of the large coupling constant $g_{\omega \pi}$ (0.334). Close to the upper kinematic limit ($-t \sim -t_{\text{max}}$) the cross section is well reproduced by the exchange of the nucleon Regge trajectory in the $u$ channel [20]. At intermediate momentum transfer, the two-gluon exchange contribution underestimates (by an order of magnitude) the experimental cross section. The calculation uses the same expression as in our phi-photoproduction work [5,8], where only the relevant mass transitions.

![FIG. 4. Differential cross section for $\gamma p \rightarrow p \omega$ as measured in CLAS for the energy bin $E_\gamma = 3.38-3.56$ GeV compared with existing data. See the text for the explanation of the curves. In this energy bin, $\theta^\omega = 90^\circ$ corresponds to $-t = 2.52$ GeV$^2$.](image)

![FIG. 5. Differential cross section measured in CLAS. The fourth energy bin ($E_\gamma = 3.38-3.56$ GeV) is shown in Fig. 4.](image)
interchange processes, suppressed in the dependence. Good agreement is achieved when quark cross section at large momentum transfer and its energy have been observed in the behavior, seen for other exclusive reactions [2,28], has been supported in part by the Italian Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the Commissariat à l’Energie Atomique, the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation, and the Korea Science and Engineering Foundation. The Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) operates the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility for the United States Department of Energy under Contract No. DE-AC05-84ER40150.

The measured $d\sigma/dt$ in the other three photon energy bins are shown in Fig. 5. From the four data sets, the cross section at $\theta^\omega_\pi = 90^\circ$ was extracted as a function of energy. A power-law fit $s^{-c}$ to $d\sigma/dt$ at $\theta^\omega_\pi = 90^\circ$ was performed also using the only other datum available in the literature (SLAC datum at $s = 6.13 \text{ GeV}^2$ [2]). The experimental points include both statistical and systematic errors summed in quadrature. The fit yields $C = 7.2 \pm 0.7$ ($\chi^2 = 0.5$). It is the first time that such a power-law behavior, seen for other exclusive reactions [2,28], has been observed in the $\omega$ channel. The quark exchange diagrams of Fig. 1(c) (left) (pointlike interaction) and 1(c) (right) (hadronic component of the photon) have a $s^{-7}$ and a $s^{-8}$ power-law behavior, respectively, both in dimensional counting [24] and in recent models [29]. Note that the saturated $\pi$ Regge trajectory behaves like $s^{-8}$, too. Besides the differential cross section at fixed energy, the $s$ dependence is a strong hint of the presence of quark interchange hard mechanisms in addition to the two-gluon exchange process.

In conclusion, elastic photoproduction of the $\omega$ mesons from the proton was measured for the first time with nearly complete kinematic coverage. The energy power-law behavior of the differential cross section at $\theta^\omega_\pi = 90^\circ$ was observed. The comparison with a QCD-inspired model, able to reproduce the $\phi$ and the $\rho^0$ photoproduction data, provides further evidence for the presence of hard processes. Adopting a QCD language in this energy region, the two-gluon exchange mechanism (that fully describes the $\phi$ photoproduction data) badly misses the cross section at large momentum transfer and its energy dependence. Good agreement is achieved when quark interchange processes, suppressed in the $\phi$ channel and weakly contributing in the $\rho$ case, are included in an effective way in the calculation of the $\omega$ cross section.