Insights from recent experimental campaigns towards Compton imaging for dosimetry in boron neutron capture therapy

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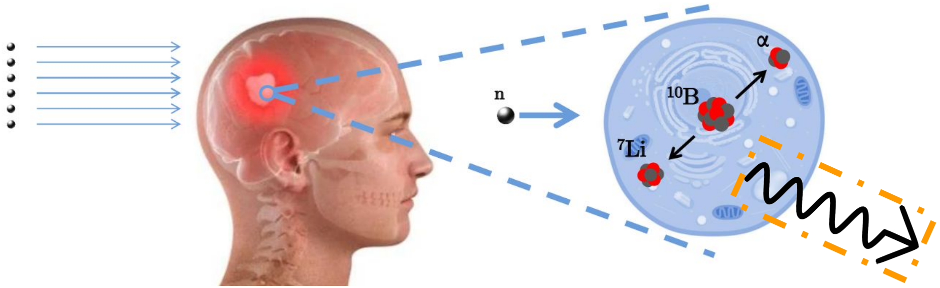
Outline

- Motivation: Boron neutron capture therapy
  - The State of the Art: Current dosimetry strategies and devices
- Our proposal for BNCT dose monitoring
  - Experimental Campaigns
    - Assessing feasibility and searching for main challenges
  - Tech Developments
- Conclusions

Boron Neutron Capture Therapy

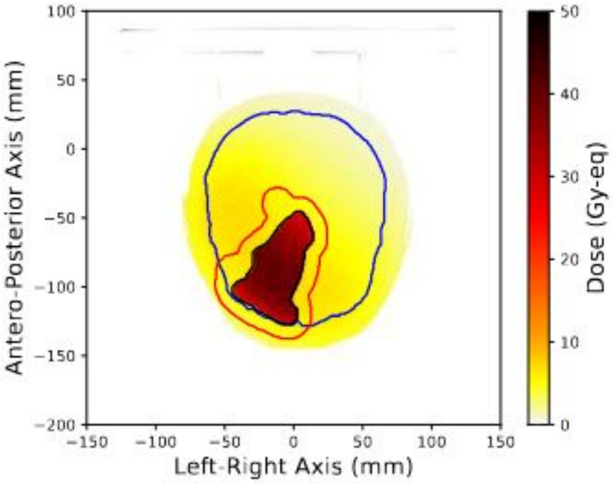


BNCT dosimetry is complicated:

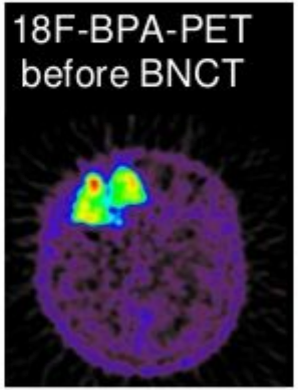
$$D = w_B D_B + w_{n,th} D_{n,th} + w_{n,f} D_{n,f} + D_\gamma$$

^{10}BPA intravenous infusion / 20 ppm ^{10}B in blood

IAEA, Interactive Map of Accelerators, https://nucleus.iaea.org/sites/accelerators/Pages/Interactive-Map-of-Accelerators.aspx



Dosimetry in BNCT

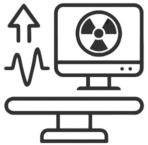


Current procedure

(1) Previous PET study of boron uptake with ^{18}F-BPA (up to 1 month before treatment)
(2) Boron concentration monitoring in blood during the treatment
(3) Extrapolation of dose based on (1) and (2)

Ideal objective

- Reliable and non-extrapolation-based dose determination
- High spatial resolution and real-time monitoring of the therapeutic dose
- Comprehensive detection of all BNCT dose components
- Compact, low-activation design that minimizes secondary radiation exposure



Dosimetry in BNCT

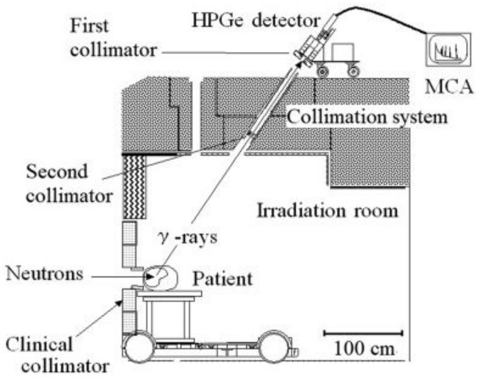
Main challenges to develop a BNCT dose monitor

- High Count Rates
- Large Neutron and Gamma Backgrounds
- Resolution demands from clinicians
- Real-time analysis for monitoring

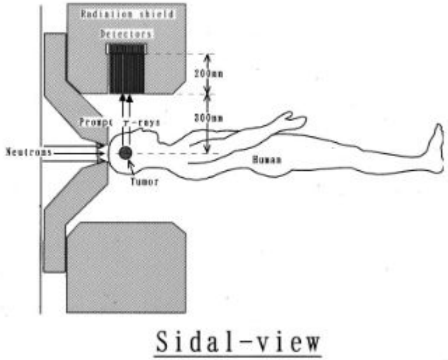
Current proposals in the field:

Telescope monitors, SPECT, Compton Cameras

None commercial or for clinical use, all under development



Y. Sakurai et al. *App. Radiat. Isot.* 2020
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apradiso.2020.109256



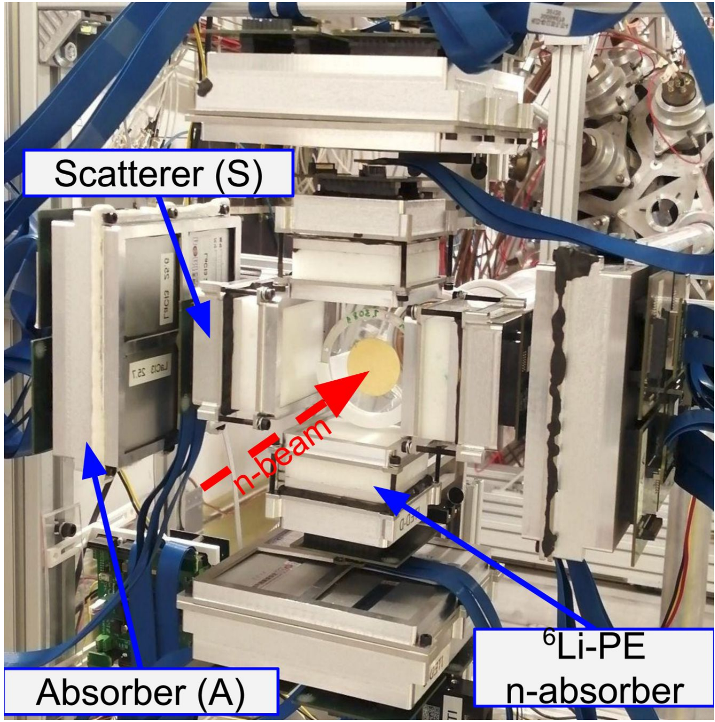
T. Kobayashi et al. *Med. Phys.* 2000
https://doi.org/10.1118/1.1288243

iTED

ERC-CoG HYMNS Developments: from the i-TED Compton Imaging Array for nuclear astrophysics at n_TOF - CERN to ERC-PoC AMA for medical applications

$LaCl_3$ scintillators + SiPM (8x8 SensL) readout with PETsys electronics

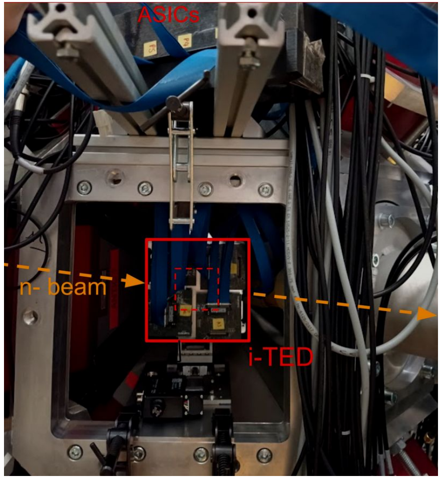
- **Optimized** for **lowest neutron-induced** backgrounds (unique!)
- **Largest efficiency** (unique!) → Real Time Monitor
- **Large Field Of View** (1 scatter: 4 absorbers pyramidal configuration)
- **Optimized** for high-energy gamma rays and high count rates
- 1280 readout channels
- **AI**-aided **2D** and **3D** image-reconstruction algorithms

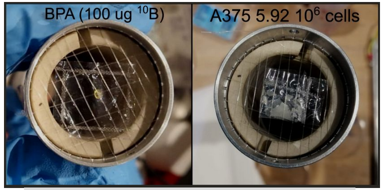


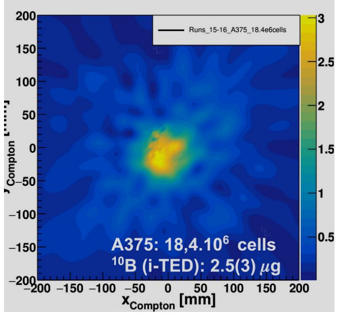
iTED for BNCT - Experiments at ILL

High intensity pencil beam at ILL
(FIPPS instrument, 10^8 n/cm^2/s, ∅1.5 cm)

Campaign 1 (2023): Assessing sensitivity under low background conditions



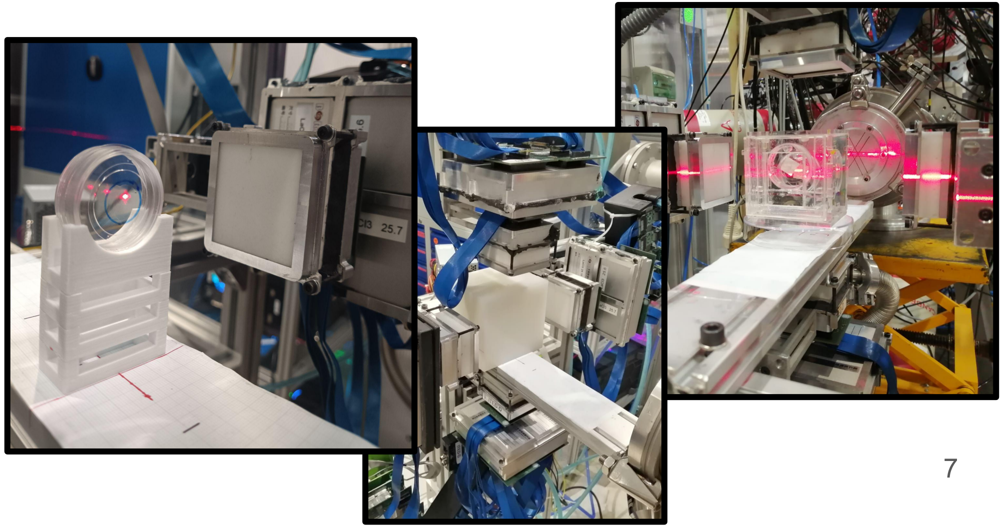




J. Lerendegui-Marco et al. First Pilot Tests of Compton Imaging and Boron Concentration Measurements in BNCT Using i-TED (2025)
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apradiso.2025.112009

Campaign 2 (2024): Evaluating i-TED performance under stressful high-count rate conditions

Borated samples in phantoms of different materials and sizes (teflon,PMMA, HDPE, Water)



iTED for BNCT - Experiments at ILL

Campaign 2: Evaluating i-TED performance under stressful high-count rate conditions

NEUTRONS FOR SOCIETY

Searching for bottlenecks and limitations

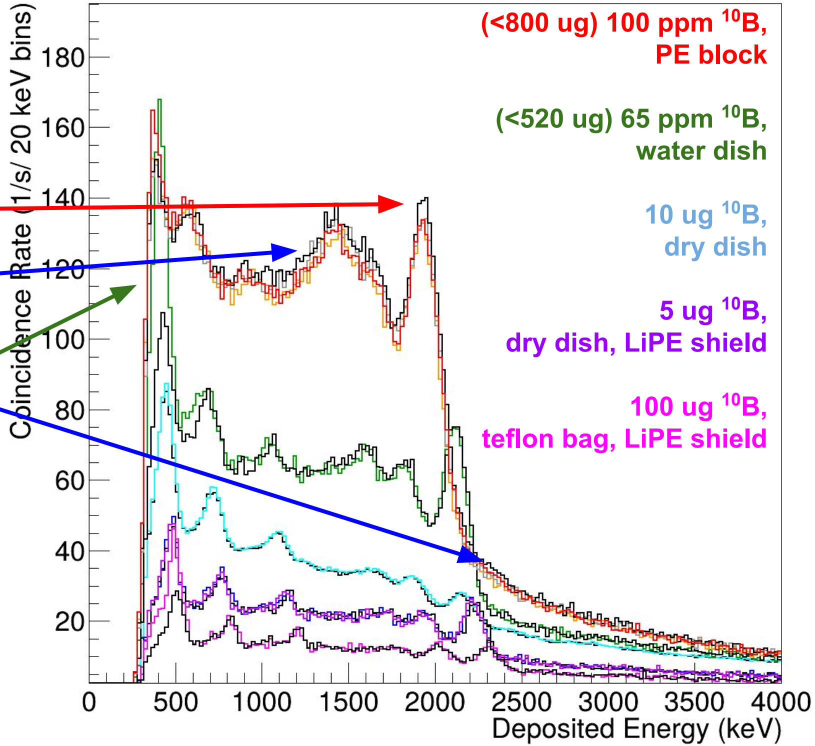
- Bckg → Dominated by neutron induced 2.2 MeV gamma rays (^{1}H captures)
- Signal detection → Low energy thresholds and angular discrimination
- High Count rates → Dead time losses and pileup + Also gain drift induced

Also good news

- Clear 478 keV sensitivity of 65 ppm ^{10}B concentration (typical tumor uptake) (when above threshold, water dish, green line in figure)

Addressing the challenges

- Lower count rates →Thinner crystals
- Lower energy threshold→Thinner Scatterer
- Large gamma background→Dedicated angular discrimination for improved signal rejection
- **<u>All: Use of pixelated detectors</u>**



i-TED for BNCT - Why Pixelation?

Our timing configuration goes:
Signal (charge) integration window: 320 ns

Event (pixel) integration window: 100 ns

In Monolithic crystals:

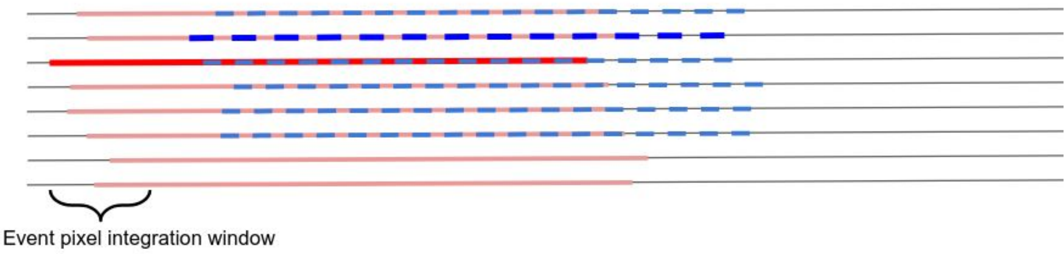
A large fraction of pixels are triggered (possibly all of them if E_{dep} is large)

In Pixelated crystals:

Only one pixel is triggered

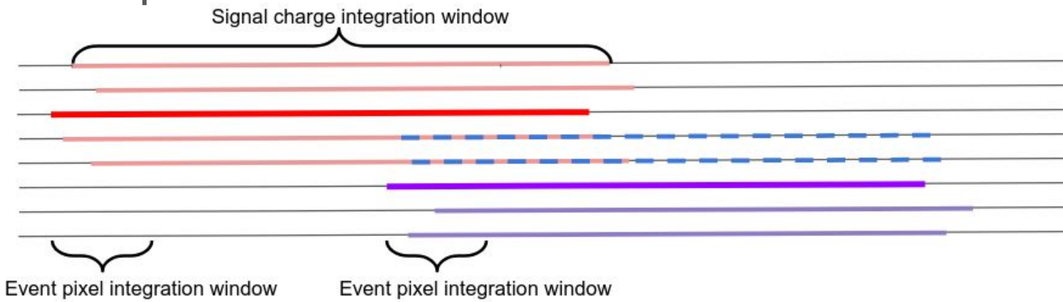
Under high count rate conditions:

Example 1:



The second event is not recovered, most of it is included in the previous event (almost full pile up)
Observed count rates are lower than real, events recovered are not valid events

Example 2:



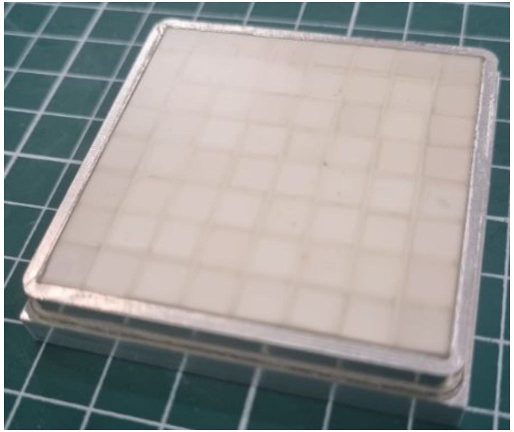
The second event is partly recovered, and some is included in the previous event.
The system could be trapped in a chain of badly recognized events.

i-TED for BNCT - CLLBC Pixelated crystal

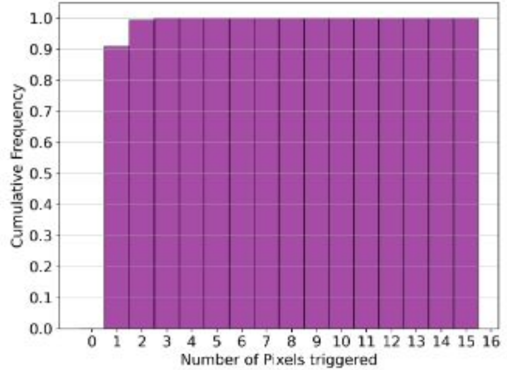
See talk Sebastián Valladares (tomorrow)
https://indico.ific.uv.es/event/8035/contributions/29025/

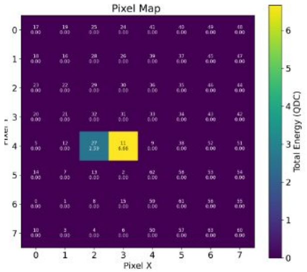
We have a **CLLBC** ($Cs_2LiLa(BrCl)_6$:Ce) pixelated crystal

- Capable of gamma and neutron discrimination
- 50x50x6 mm^3 array of 8x8 pixels (matching our 8x8 Onsemi SiPMs)
- Equipped with a **dedicated light-guide layer** to avoid light diffusion and pixel cross-talk



We tested at our lab and checked the **high quality pixel light isolation.**
Most **gamma** events trigger a single pixel (>90 %)
The remaining 10 % correspond to two-pixel events (Compton scattering followed by capture in adjacent pixels, cross-checked via simulations)
Tested also with **neutrons** (larger ~3.5 MeV signals), with only slight deterioration (~14 % of 2-pixel events)

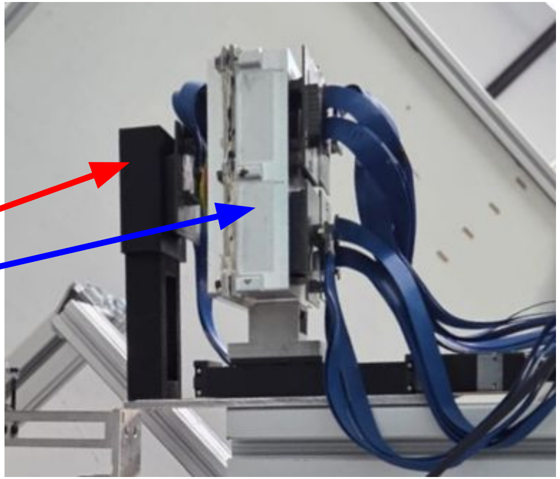




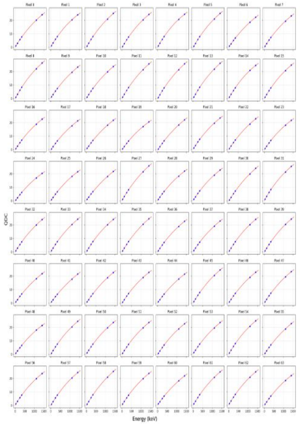
i-TED-P for BNCT

We have just commissioned the first i-TED module with a pixelated crystal

- Pixelated Scatterer: CLLBC crystal, 8x8 pixels (5.7x5.7x6 mm^3)
- Monolithic Absorbers: 4 thinner $LaCl_3$ crystals (50x50x15 mm^3)

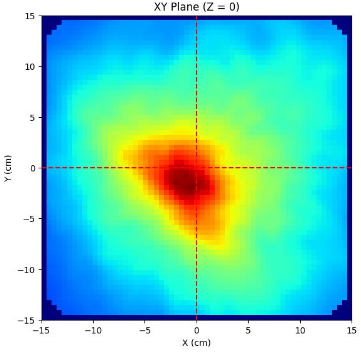


Full 64 pixel independent calibrations for the pixelated scatterer
+ 4 aggregate calibrations for the 4 monolithic absorbers

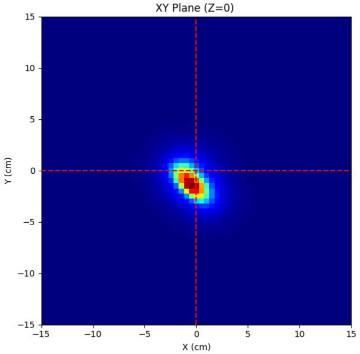


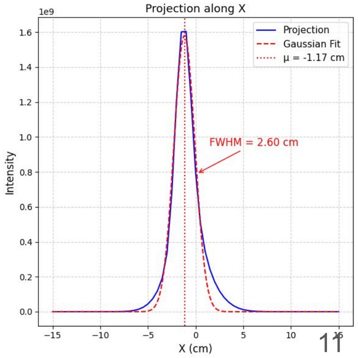
First 3D image reconstruction with a ^{22}Na point source

BP



LM-MLEM



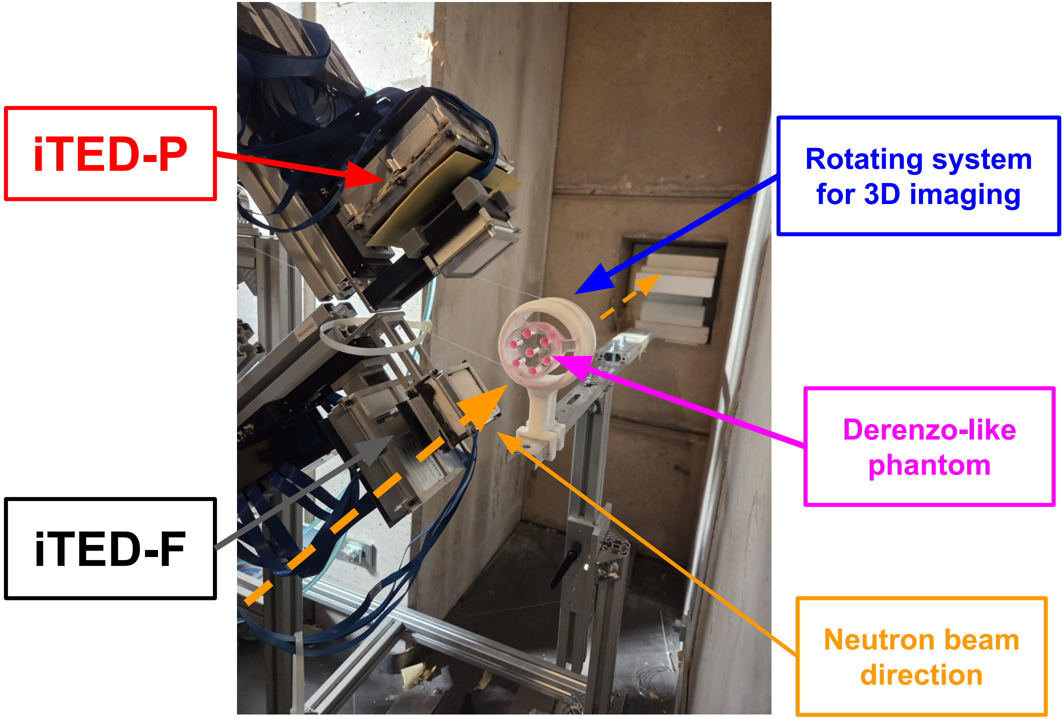


Campaign at LENA - Pavia

UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

LENA Reactor
250 kW

Neutron beamline:
5 cm diameter,
$5 \cdot 10^6$ n/cm^2/s



2 iTED modules:

- iTED-F = default module
- iTED-P = pixelated Scatterer
  (still monolithic absorbers, but thinner)

Also in this and previous campaign, tests of Gamma-neutron dual vision (GNVision)
See talk Andrea Sanchís (tomorrow)
https://indico.ific.uv.es/event/8035/contributions/29023/

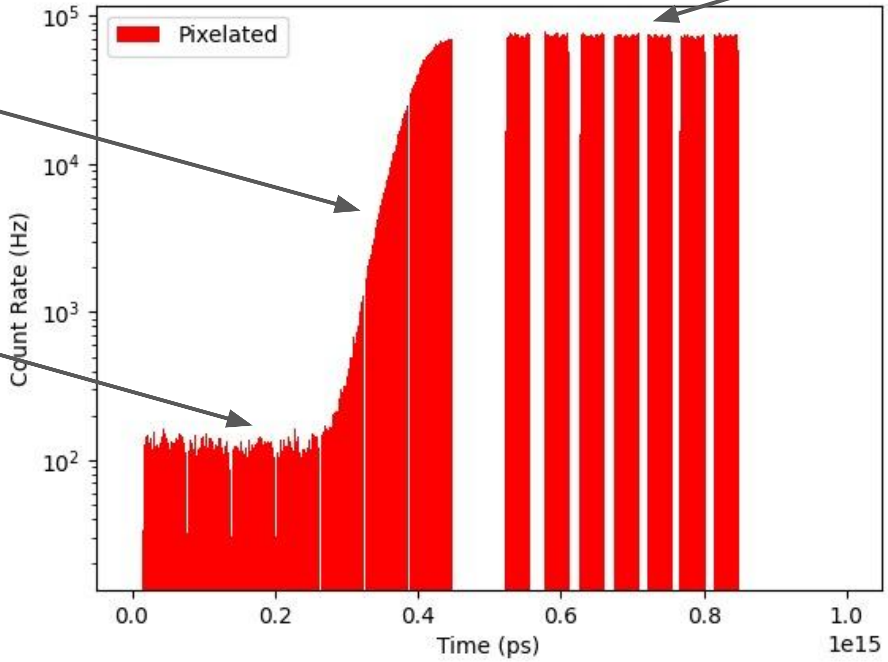
Campaign at LENA - Pavia

Count rates during the reactor ramp up (0 → 250 kW)

Ramp-up (~3 min)

Background (Beam off, 4 min) background

Series of 30 s measurements during reactor operation at nominal power



Campaign at LENA - Pavia

Count rates during the reactor ramp up (0 → 250 kW)

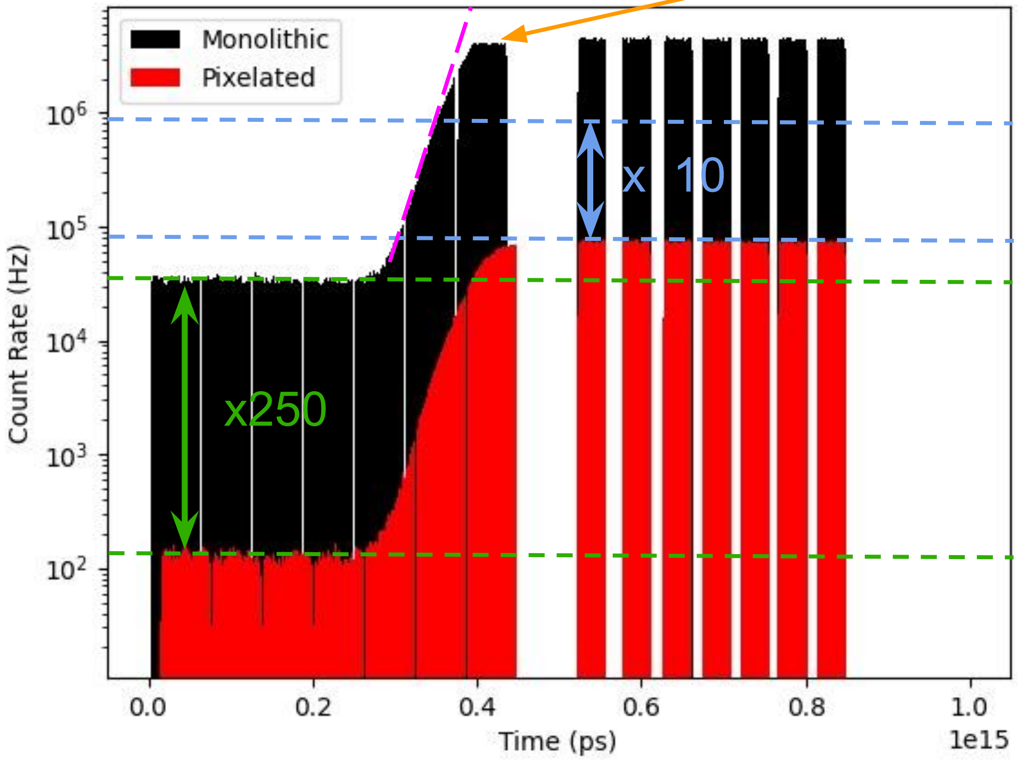
Pixelated pixel firing rates go much lower, due to:

- Pixelation (up to 64 factor down)
- Thinner crystal (~3-4 factor down)

When reactor at 0 power, iTED-P CR: **x250 lower**

At maximum power, still at least **x10 margin** before DT issues become dominant

Clear saturation in monolithic



Conclusions

- **BNCT** requires a reliable in-beam dose monitoring system to ensure safety and efficacy in clinical applications.
- **Compton imaging** presents a promising approach for real-time dose monitoring in BNCT environments.
- A design based on the **iTED** concept has already demonstrated strong potential.
- Ongoing developments are addressing the specific challenges posed by BNCT.
    - **Experimental campaigns** have been conducted to systematically identify and characterize these challenges.
    - We are currently exploring **pixelation** of our crystals as a means to reduce the extremely high count rates and associated distortive effects.
    - **New** (**preliminary**) **results** from our campaign at LENA Pavia proves the pixelation as an **effective strategy** to operate in **high intensity radiation environments.**

Thank you for your attention!

Acknowledge financial support from ERC Grant Agreement Nr. 101137646 (AMA) and AEI PID2022-138297NB-C21

i-TED for BNCT - Pixelation

Pros and Cons of Pixelation to our goals

- Reduces pixel trigger rates → Allows higher count rates ✅
- Allows for better bad event rejection (e.g. multiple Compton interactions inside the same crystal) ✅

This is our main goal

We get a 10 % cleaner Compton event list with this

- Slightly improves time resolution 👌

To be confirmed if this really helps in stressful conditions

- Reduces spatial resolution (weighting-based event position reconstruction cannot be used) but avoids dealing with decompression distortions ❗

Not a big deal of a worsening in our case with thinner crystals

- Lower energy resolution (smaller crystals) ❌

Not the largest loss of resolution, electronics contribution still dominates

- Light concentration to a single pixel strongly reduces the dynamic range, forces gain reductions ❌

Dealt with changes in the electronics configuration

Campaign at LENA - Pavia

Count rates during the reactor ramp up (0 → 250 kW)

Clear saturation in monolithic

DT noticeable as beam intensity rises

Normalized count rates when reactor down (assuming DT effects negligible at that rate)