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Charge identification of nuclear fragments with the FOOT Time-Of-Flight system

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Charge identification of nuclear fragments with the FOOT Time-Of-Flight system

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Abstract

FOOT (FragmentatiON Of Target) is an applied nuclear physics experiment designed for measuring with high precision the production cross sections of nuclear fragments for energies, beams and targets relevant in particle therapy and radioprotection in space. These measurements are important to estimate the physical and biological effects of nuclear fragments, which are produced when energetic particle beams penetrate human tissue.

A component of the FOOT experiment is the ΔE -TOF system, which is designed to measure energy loss and time-of-flight of nuclear fragments produced in particle collisions in thin targets in order to extract their charge and velocity. The ΔE -TOF system is composed of a start counter, providing the start time for the time-of-flight, and a 40×40 cm² wall of thin plastic scintillator bars, providing the stop time and energy loss of the fragments passing through the detector. Particle charge discrimination can be achieved by correlating the energy loss in the scintillator bars with the measured time-of-flight.

Recently, we have built a full-scale ΔE -TOF detector prototype. In this work, we describe the energy and time-of-flight calibration procedure and assess the performance of the ΔE -TOF prototype. We use data acquired during beam tests at CNAO with proton and ¹²C beams and at GSI with ¹⁶O beams in the energy range relevant for particle therapy, from 60 to 400 MeV/u. For heavy fragments (C and O), we obtain energy and time resolutions ranging from 4.0 to 5.2% and from 54 to 84 ps, respectively. The procedure is also applied to a fragmentation measurement of a 400 MeV/u ¹⁶O beam on a 5 mm carbon target, showing that the system is capable of discriminating the charges of impinging fragments.

Keywords: FOOT, charge identification, nuclear fragmentation, particle therapy, time-of-flight

1. Introduction

Particle therapy is an external beam radiotherapy technique that uses charged particles (mostly protons or ¹²C ions) for tumor treatment. Thanks to their typical depth-dose profile (Bragg peak), more conformal dose distributions can be realized with charged particle therapy than with conventional radiotherapy [1]. Although particle therapy is becoming a more widespread treatment modality, much research is still needed to further improve its accuracy.

An important research topic is to reduce the uncertainty of the radiobiological effectiveness (RBE) of particle beams. This quantity, needed to calculate biological dose and to predict treatment outcomes, demonstrates a complex dependency on several physical and biological parameters, among which the spectrum of nuclear fragments produced in interactions of the particle beam with the patient tissue [2–4]. To simulate the biological effect of these fragments and take it into account in particle therapy treatment planning, it is important to accurately model their production [5, 6]. Differential cross section measurements for nuclear fragment production in thin targets are the most valuable for this purpose. However, such data are scarce and limited to few projectiles and energies [7–10]. Apart from particle therapy, these measurements are also of great importance for radioprotection in space [11].

17 The goal of the FOOT (FragmentatiOn Of Target) experiment [12] is to provide double
18 differential cross section measurements with respect to kinetic energy and direction for beams
19 and targets of interest for particle therapy. Using a fixed target setup, all relevant characteris-
20 tics of fragments produced in thin tissue-like targets will be measured for a variety of particle
21 beams. FOOT aims at achieving a resolution of approximately 2-3% and 5% for charge and mass
22 measurements of nuclear fragments, respectively, and a 5% accuracy on cross section measure-
23 ments [13]. To reach this goal, FOOT will acquire data with two different setups: an emulsion
24 spectrometer, dedicated to the detection of light charged fragments ($Z \leq 3$), and an electronic
25 setup, focused on the study of nuclei with $3 \leq Z \leq 8$, defined here as ‘heavy’. A full description
26 of both setups is reported in [13, 14].

27 A key component in the electronic setup is the ΔE -TOF system, which will derive the charge
28 and velocity of the fragments through energy loss and time-of-flight (TOF) measurements. A
29 new full-scale prototype was recently constructed, that includes a start counter and a 40×40
30 cm^2 wall of thin plastic scintillator bars.

31 The goal of the present work is to assess the performance of the full scale ΔE -TOF prototype
32 in terms of TOF and ΔE accuracy, and to verify whether the FOOT requirements are met, using
33 new beam test measurements at two different particle therapy treatment centers. In particular,
34 we describe an energy and time calibration procedure to discriminate fragment charges, we
35 validate it, and apply it to detect the fragments produced in nuclear interactions of a 400
36 MeV/u ^{16}O beam impinging on a 5 mm graphite target. The measurements performed are the
37 first tests of this full prototype.

38 2. Materials and methods

39 2.1. Detectors and DAQ system

40 The aim of the ΔE -TOF system is to identify the charge of impinging particles with a
41 resolution of the order of 2-3% for heavy nuclei, such as C, N, and O. To reach this goal the
42 system should achieve for such nuclei an accuracy in energy loss and TOF measurements of at
43 most 5% and 100 ps respectively [13, 14].

44 The ΔE -TOF prototype consists of two scintillation detectors: the Start Counter (SC) and
45 the TOF-Wall (TW). The SC, the first detector encountered by the beam, is a thin ($250 \mu\text{m}$)
46 foil of plastic scintillator (EJ-228, Eljen Technology). The detector has an active area of 5×5
47 cm^2 and its main purpose is to provide the rate of primaries and the start time of each event.
48 The light produced in the SC is collected at each side of the foil using a total of 48 $3 \times 3 \text{ mm}^2$
49 ASD-NUV3S SiPMs with $25 \mu\text{m}$ microcell pitch [15].

50 The TW is made of 40 bars of plastic scintillator (EJ-200, Eljen Technology) arranged in
51 two orthogonal layers of 20 each. Each bar has an active area of $44 \times 2 \text{ cm}^2$ and is 3 mm thick.
52 The light produced in the bars is collected at each end by four $3 \times 3 \text{ mm}^2$ MPPC SiPMs with 25
53 μm microcell pitch. The purpose of the TW is to measure the energy loss ΔE of the particles
54 and to provide the stop time for TOF measurements. The characterisation and performance of
55 the bars was described previously [16–19]. Figure 1 shows a picture of the two components of
56 the ΔE -TOF system.

57 The signals collected by the SiPMs of both detectors are sampled through WaveDREAM
58 digitizer boards (WDB), integrated in the WaveDAQ system [20–22]. The WDBs can sample
59 up to 16 channels and also provide the supply voltage to the SiPMs of the detectors. The readout
60 of the ΔE -TOF employs 8 independent analog channels (connected to 1 WDB) for the SC and

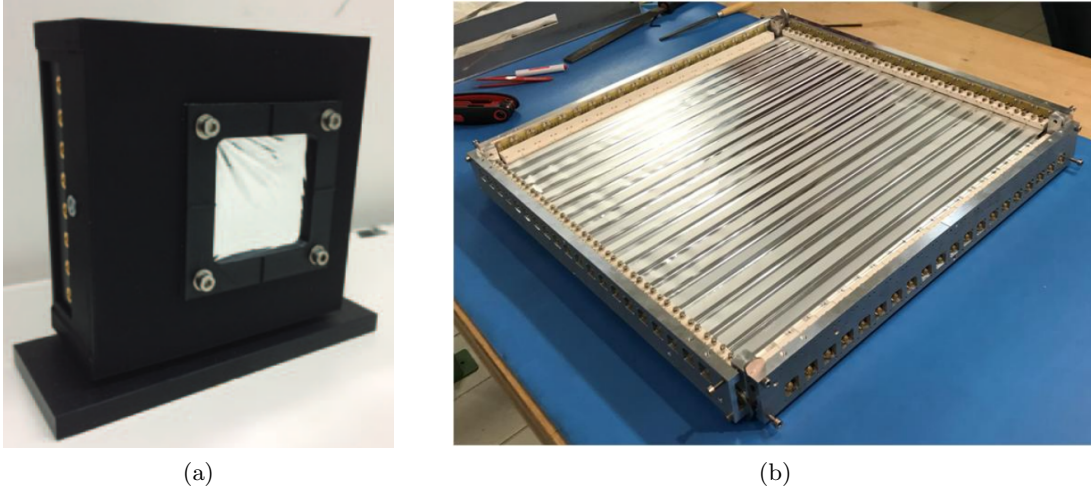


Figure 1: Components of the ΔE -TOF system: (a) Start Counter and (b) TOF-Wall.

Table 1: Summary of the data samples analyzed in this work: treatment center, particle beam, energy, purpose of the acquisition, and target (if present).

Setup	Particle	Energy [MeV/u]	Purpose	Target
CNAO	p	60	Calibration	-
CNAO	^{12}C	115	Calibration	-
CNAO	^{12}C	260	Calibration	-
CNAO	^{12}C	400	Calibration	-
GSI	^{16}O	400	Calibration	-
GSI	^{16}O	400	Fragmentation	5 mm graphite

61 2 channels for each bar of the TW (80 channels and 7 WDBs in total). The data acquisitions
 62 considered in this work were performed with a sampling frequency of 4 GSamples/s.

63 2.2. Data samples

64 Data were acquired during two beam tests performed recently. A summary of the irradiations
 65 is given in Table 1. The first beam test was carried out at the Centro Nazionale di Adroterapia
 66 Oncologica (CNAO) in Pavia (Italy). The aim was to perform a set of detector calibration runs.
 67 The distance between SC and TW was 42.5 cm. The beams employed were protons at 60 MeV
 68 and ^{12}C ions at 115, 260 and 400 MeV/u. Due to time constraints, the TW was only partly
 69 irradiated. We ensured that all bars were irradiated at least at the center. The irradiation of
 70 the TW in different positions was carried out by moving the detector while keeping the beam
 71 line fixed. In this way, the distance between the SC and TW along the beam line was constant
 72 during the acquisitions. Events were recorded when at least one bar in each layer was triggered.
 73 A total of 5000 events was acquired in each irradiated TW hit position, defined as the region
 74 where two bars (one per layer) overlap (Fig. 2). Hereafter, hit positions will be denoted by the
 75 index i .

76 The second beam test was carried out at the GSI Heavy Ion Research Center in Darmstadt
 77 (Germany), two weeks after the CNAO data acquisitions. It should be noted that, between the
 78 two data takings, the ΔE -TOF system was disassembled for transport and subsequently rebuilt,
 79 partly with different cables. In this case, the SC and TW were placed at a distance of 2.23 m.
 80 The FOOT beam monitoring system, the vertex detector and a calorimeter module were also

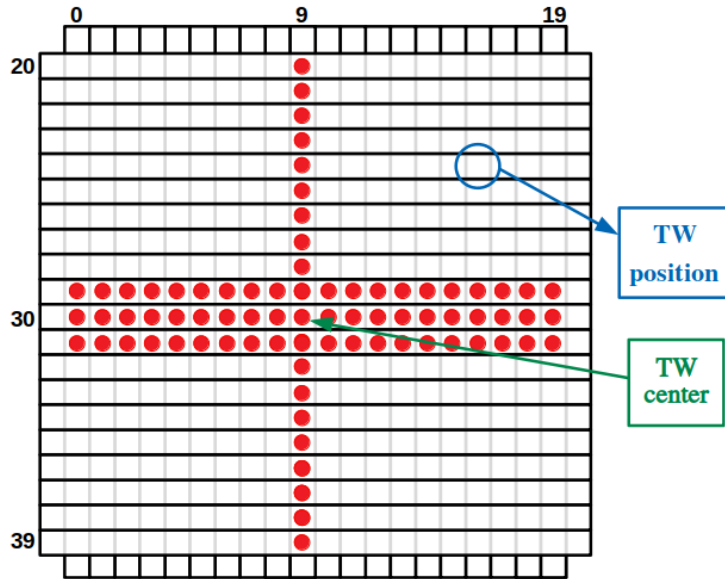


Figure 2: Schematic view of the TW showing the bar labels and the irradiated positions (red dots) during the calibration runs at CNAO.

81 present, but not included in this analysis. At GSI, we acquired two data samples. First, a
 82 calibration run was carried out with a ^{16}O beam at 400 MeV/u in the same way as described
 83 above. During this run, we acquired a total of $\sim 6.8 \cdot 10^4$ events in different TW positions. Due
 84 to time constraints, again only a limited number of bars was irradiated, and mostly in central
 85 positions. Second, we inserted a 5 mm graphite target to study the fragmentation of a 400
 86 MeV/u ^{16}O beam. Here the beam line was directed at the center of the TW and we acquired a
 87 total of $\sim 4.5 \cdot 10^4$ events. The setup of the data taking is shown in Fig. 3.

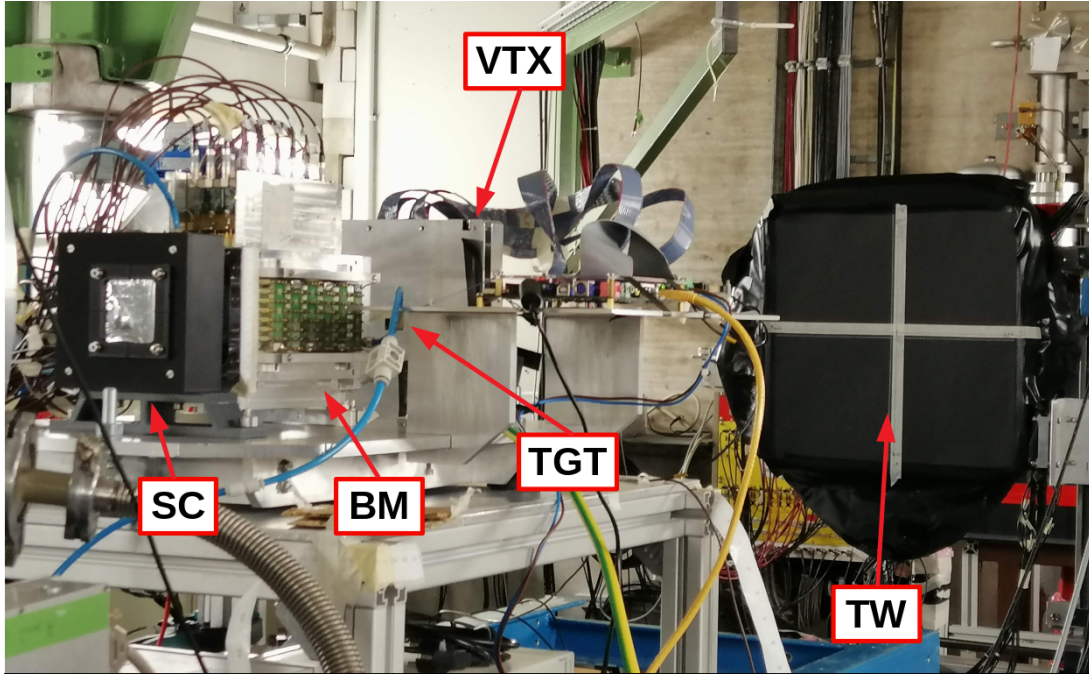
88 2.3. MC simulations

89 We performed MC simulations in order to provide a set of reference values for the ΔE
 90 and TOF calibration procedures. The data samples of Table 1 were all simulated with the
 91 FLUKA code [23, 24] by accurately reproducing both setups. The simulations did not take
 92 into consideration light generation and optical photon transport inside the bars. For each data
 93 sample, 10^6 events were simulated. For each event, we registered the interaction times of the
 94 particles with both detectors and the energy loss in the TW bars. We extracted for each event:

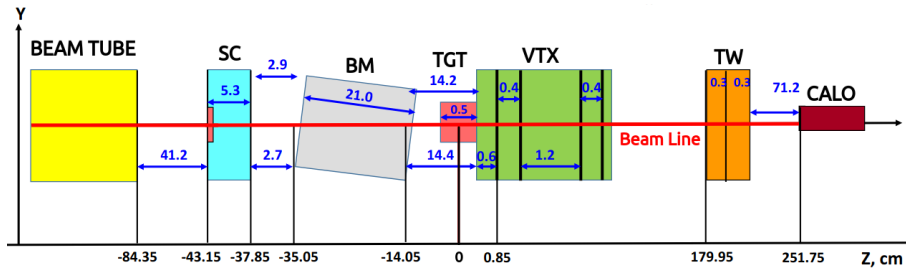
- 95 • The hit position i of each particle passing through the bar;
- 96 • The time of flight $\text{TOF}_{\text{MC},i,l}$ between SC and TW layer l , where $l = F$ for the front and
 97 $l = R$ for the rear layer, respectively;
- 98 • The energy loss $\Delta E_{\text{MC},i,l}$ in TW layer l ;

99 For the fragmentation sample, we also registered the time it takes the primary ^{16}O beam to
 100 travel from the SC to the target, TOF'_{MC} .

101 Two sets of MC simulations were produced. An initial set was produced, where only the
 102 intrinsic statistical fluctuations were included, and used to extract the reference values for the
 103 calibration (see Sec. 2.4 and 2.6). Furthermore a second set was produced after the calibra-
 104 tion was applied, that included the observed average energy and time resolutions by means of



(a)



(b)

Figure 3: (a) Schematic view and (b) picture of the GSI setup. The pictures also show the target (TGT), the tracking detectors included in the setup, i.e. the Beam Monitor (BM) and the Vertex (VTX), and a calorimeter module (CALO). For a complete description of these components of FOOT, see [12, 13].

105 Gaussian smearing. These two sets are referred to as ‘untuned’ and ‘tuned’ MC simulations,
 106 respectively.

107

108 2.4. ΔE calibration

109 A signal processing routine was developed to handle the waveforms obtained from the SC
 110 and TW and all the associated WaveDAQ clocks (CLKs), so the raw energy loss and time-of-
 111 flight could be extracted. We use the term ‘raw’ to indicate that both quantities still need to
 112 be calibrated to match MC values.

113 Regarding the energy loss, the raw values were extracted directly from the TW signals. First,
 114 the two channels of each bar involved in the event (hereafter indicated with the subscripts A/B)
 115 were processed separately and the charge collected in each of them, $Q_{A/B}$, was evaluated as the
 116 area of the signals. Supposing a simple exponential attenuation along the bar, the total charge
 117 collected was defined as [16]

$$Q = \sqrt{Q_A \cdot Q_B} \quad (1)$$

118 Q represents the raw energy loss of particles traveling through the bar. Ideally, it should be
 119 independent of the hit position along the bar. However, we noticed that the mean value of Q ,
 120 obtained by fitting with a Gaussian, varies along the bars, as can be seen in Fig. 4 for ^{12}C ions
 121 of 260 MeV/u. Differences up to 15% were seen in this case. Moreover, the mean value of the
 122 detected charge was asymmetric for the two sides of the bar. We verified that other bars and
 123 data samples showed a similar trend. This may be due to differences in total internal reflection
 124 efficiency, light absorption along the bar, optical coupling and SiPM gain between the two sides.
 We come back to these issues in Sec. 4. A practical and accurate approach to take into account

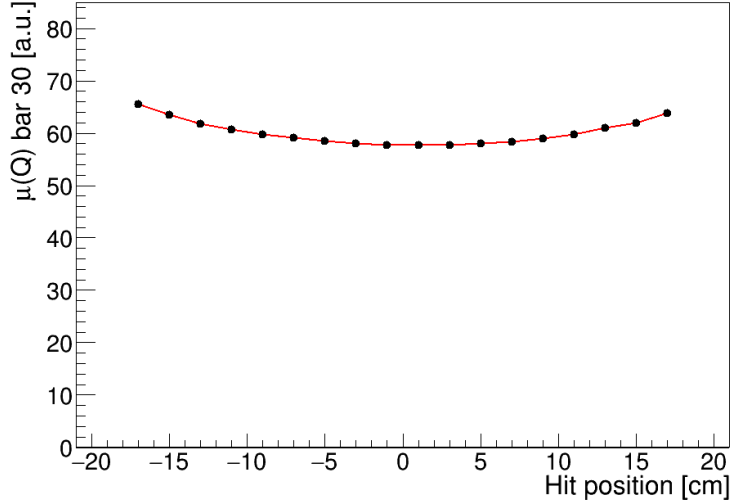


Figure 4: Mean value of the total charge collected Q in the central bar of the front layer of the TW as a function of the hit position during the calibration run with 260 MeV/u ^{12}C ions. Error bars are displayed but small, since they represent the standard error on the mean obtained from the Gaussian fit. The origin of the x axis indicates the center of the bar.

125

126 the observed position-dependence was to calibrate each TW position separately for the two TW
 127 layers. For each layer, we have $20 \times 20 = 400$ hit positions (see Fig. 2) to calibrate.

128 The method used to calibrate the charge response was based on finding a relationship be-
 129 tween the detected charge and a reference energy loss value, which was obtained from the MC
 130 simulations. For this purpose the mean value $\mu(Q_{i,l})$ of the collected charge Q over all events
 131 in position i in layer l was plotted as a function of the mean energy loss expected from MC,
 132 $\mu(\Delta E_{\text{MC},i,l})$, and fitted with Birks' model [25]:

$$\mu(Q_{i,l}) = \frac{p_{0,i,l} \mu(\Delta E_{\text{MC},i,l})}{1 + p_{1,i,l} \mu(\Delta E_{\text{MC},i,l})} \quad (2)$$

133 where $p_{0,i,l}$ and $p_{1,i,l}$ represent respectively the charge conversion factor and the saturation pa-
 134 rameter of the model. Although we applied this formula position-per-position, we do not believe
 135 that the true Birks' parameters p_0 and p_1 change along the bar. However, this approach helps to
 136 parameterise experimentally non trivial dependencies that cannot be described via the current
 137 MC simulations. In other words, we use Birks' model merely as a convenient parameterization.

138 Figure 5 displays an example of the energy calibration curve obtained for a position of the
 139 front layer of the TW. What can be seen is that the light output of the bar is reproduced by
 140 the simple model from Eq. 2. To assure a reliable fit, for each layer we applied Eq. 2 to all
 141 positions that registered more than 40 events in, at least, 4 of the 5 calibration samples. If this
 142 condition was satisfied in both layers of the TW, the position was defined as 'well-calibrated'.

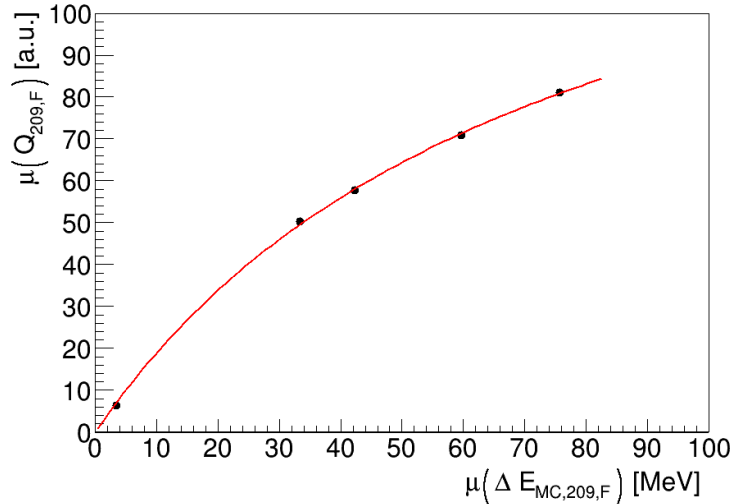


Figure 5: Energy calibration curve obtained with the Birks-like model for the central position ($i = 209$) of the front layer ($l = F$) of the TW. Error bars are displayed but small, since they represent the standard error on the mean obtained from the Gaussian fit.

143 Using the parameters extracted through Eq. 2 for these positions, it was then possible to retrieve
 144 the energy loss of each event in a given position and layer through the inverse formula

$$\Delta E_{i,l} = \frac{Q_{i,l}}{p_{0,i,l} - p_{1,i,l} Q_{i,l}} \quad (3)$$

145 The calibrated energy loss of a particle in a given position i , ΔE_i , was then defined as the sum
 146 of the energy loss in the two layers of the TW:

$$\Delta E_i = \Delta E_{i,F} + \Delta E_{i,R} \quad (4)$$

147 2.5. Energy resolution

148 The overall energy resolution of the system was then extracted from the calibrated energy
 149 loss values as follows. The ΔE_i (Eq. 4) values obtained for each event in all well-calibrated
 150 positions of a calibration sample were merged into one ‘global’ distribution to obtain the energy
 151 spectrum of the acquisition. Then, we performed a Gaussian fit on the resulting distribution
 152 to extract the mean value $\mu(\Delta E)$ and standard deviation $\sigma(\Delta E)$ of each sample. The energy
 153 resolution of the system was defined as the $\sigma(\Delta E)$ value obtained.

154 In order to perform a more realistic MC-data comparison, we needed to parameterize the
 155 contribution to the energy resolution of all the effects not described in detail in the MC, such as
 156 photon production, optical transport, electronics, etc. This contribution, indicated as $\sigma_{par}(\Delta E)$,
 157 could be disentangled by quadratically subtracting the intrinsic term, evaluated as the spread in
 158 untuned MC simulations, from the overall measured energy resolution $\sigma(\Delta E)$ in each calibration
 159 sample. We then parameterized the quantity $\sigma_{par}(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E)$ as a function of $\mu(\Delta E)$ with a
 160 constant and used this parameterization to produce the tuned MC simulations (see Sec. 2.3).
 161 Since data were acquired with two experimental setups under different conditions, the measured
 162 resolution may vary between the CNAO and GSI samples. Therefore, we chose to parameterize
 163 the response of the ΔE -TOF only with CNAO data. The obtained results are discussed in
 164 Sec. 3.1.

165 *2.6. TOF calibration*

166 The start time T_{SC} of each event was extracted from the SC waveforms. First, the 8 signals
 167 of the SC were summed into a single one. Then the value of T_{SC} was obtained by applying
 168 a Constant Fraction Discriminator (CFD) algorithm to the summed waveform induced by the
 169 particle that passes through the detector. The fraction of the CFD was set to 0.3 on the basis
 170 of former studies [16].

171 The stop time of each event was extracted from the TW signals. For this purpose, the two
 172 channels of each TW bar involved in the event were processed separately and the raw TOF
 173 was extracted as follows. First, the single channel stop times ($T_{A/B}$) were obtained through the
 174 CFD method, again with fraction 0.3. Second, the CLK signals between TW and SC had to be
 175 synchronized. This was achieved by calculating the phase of each CLK involved in the events
 176 and extracting the phase difference $\Delta_{CLK,A/B}$ between the clocks of the TW and that of the
 177 SC [26]. Then, the raw TOF value was calculated for each bar as:

$$\text{TOF}_{\text{raw}} = T_{\text{bar}} - T_{SC} \quad (5)$$

178 where T_{bar} is the stop time associated to a TW bar, synchronized with the SC:

$$T_{\text{bar}} = \frac{T_A - \Delta_{CLK,A} + T_B - \Delta_{CLK,B}}{2} \quad (6)$$

179 An example of the mean value of TOF_{raw} (obtained by fitting with a Gaussian) as a function
 180 of the hit position along one of the front bars is given in Fig. 6. Variations up to about 100 ps
 181 were found, with lower TOF_{raw} values at the sides of the bar (see Fig. 6). We believe that this
 182 effect originates from the same factors causing the charge variation (see Sec. 2.4). Therefore we
 183 calibrated the TOF taking into account the position where the bar was hit, as already done for
 the energy calibration.

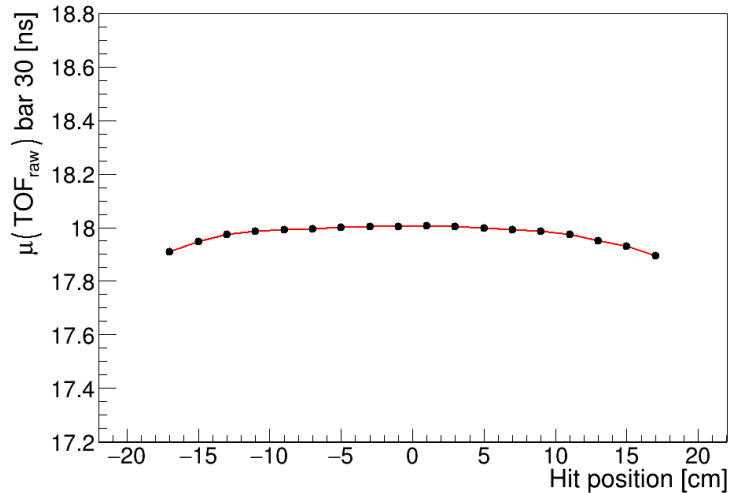


Figure 6: Mean value of the raw TOF measured along the central bar of the front TW layer for the ^{12}C beam at 260 MeV/u. The origin of the x axis indicates the center of the bar, as in Fig. 4. Again, error bars are displayed but small, since they represent the standard error on the mean obtained from the Gaussian fit.

184

185 The TOF calibration was aimed at relating the raw TOF values from Eq. 5 for the calibration
 186 runs to a reference value, which we defined to be the expected TOF value between the SC to
 187 the TW, obtained from the MC simulations. For a given position i , we calculated for each layer
 188 l the difference between the mean values of the data and MC distributions:

$$\mu(\text{TOF}_{\text{raw},i,l}) = \mu(\text{TOF}_{\text{MC},i,l}) + a_{i,l} \quad (7)$$

189 The variable $a_{i,l}$ accounts for all the possible time offsets, such as signal propagation through
 190 cables and global time shifts between the SC and TW.

191 With the extracted $a_{i,l}$ values, the calibrated TOF of each event in a given position and
 192 layer, $\text{TOF}_{i,l}$, was retrieved by simply inverting Eq. 7:

$$\text{TOF}_{i,l} = \text{TOF}_{\text{raw},i,l} - a_{i,l} \quad (8)$$

193 For the fragmentation run, where fragments were produced in the target (which is located in
 194 between the SC and the TW, see Fig. 3a), the calibrated TOF values of the fragments should
 195 be calculated from target to TW rather than from SC to TW. In that case, we subtracted an
 196 additional offset TOF'_{MC} accounting for the time needed by the ^{16}O ions to travel from the SC
 197 to the target. In other words, for the fragmentation run we applied:

$$\text{TOF}_{i,l} = \text{TOF}_{\text{raw},i,l} - a_{i,l} - \text{TOF}'_{\text{MC}} \quad (9)$$

198 For each data sample, the calibration procedure was applied to all the positions that were
 199 well-calibrated in terms of energy (see Sec. 2.4). In those positions the calibrated TOF was
 200 defined as the mean value between the calibrated front and rear TOF:

$$\text{TOF}_i = \frac{\text{TOF}_{i,F} + \text{TOF}_{i,R}}{2} \quad (10)$$

201 2.7. TOF resolution

202 Using the TOF distributions obtained after the calibration, it was possible to assess the time
 203 resolution of the system. For each calibration sample, the overall TOF resolution was extracted
 204 by merging the data obtained from all the well-calibrated positions into one global distribution.
 205 For each sample, a Gaussian fit was applied to extract the mean value $\mu(\text{TOF})$ and standard
 206 deviation $\sigma(\text{TOF})$ of the distribution. This last parameter represents the TOF resolution of the
 207 system for the corresponding beam.

208 We then proceeded to remove the contribution of the intrinsic TOF fluctuations to the
 209 resolution by quadratically subtracting the spread observed in the un-tuned MC distributions.
 210 The extracted resolution $\sigma_{\text{par}}(\text{TOF})$ was then parameterized as a function of the energy loss
 211 using the formula

$$\sigma_{\text{par}}(\text{TOF}) = \sqrt{\frac{A}{\mu(\Delta E)} + B} \quad (11)$$

212 where A and B are free parameters [16]. The resolution obtained from Eq. 11 was then used
 213 to produce the tuned MC simulations. As already done for ΔE values (see Sec. 2.5), the
 214 parameterization of the TOF resolution was performed considering only the CNAO samples.

215 We also assessed the individual contribution of the SC and the TW, $\sigma_{\text{SC}}(\text{TOF})$ and $\sigma_{\text{TW}}(\text{TOF})$
 216 respectively, to the overall TOF resolution by supposing that:

$$\sigma^2(\text{TOF}) = \sigma_{\text{TW}}^2(\text{TOF}) + \sigma_{\text{SC}}^2(\text{TOF}) \quad (12)$$

217 The TW contribution could be extracted from the distribution of the time difference between
 218 hits in front and rear layer in the same event (thus not using SC), fitting it with a Gaussian
 219 and extracting its standard deviation $\sigma_{\text{diff}}(\text{TOF})$ in data. Then, noting that $\sigma_{\text{diff}}(\text{TOF})$ cor-
 220 responds to the quadratic sum of the time resolutions of each TW layer and considering that
 221 the error on Δ_{CLK} was negligible (~ 5 ps, see Sec. 3.2), error propagation of Eqs. 10, 8, 5 and 6
 222 gave

$$\sigma_{\text{TW}}(\text{TOF}) = \frac{\sigma_{\text{diff}}(\text{TOF})}{2} \quad (13)$$

223 The contribution of the SC could then be derived from Eq. 12.

224 *2.8. Charge identification*

225 Given the measured energy loss (Eq. 4) and TOF (Eq. 10), the charge Z_i of a particle
 226 impinging on the TW in position i was calculated for each event by inverting the Bethe-Bloch
 227 formula [27]:

$$\beta = \frac{d}{c \cdot \text{TOF}_i} \quad \rightarrow \quad Z_i = \sqrt{\frac{\Delta E_i \beta^2 A_S}{\rho \delta x K Z_S} \left(\frac{1}{2} \log \frac{2m_e c^2 \beta^2 \gamma^2 W_{max}}{I^2} - \beta^2 \right)^{-1}} \quad (14)$$

228 Here d is the distance traveled by the particles; $K = 0.307 \text{ MeV}\cdot\text{cm}^2/\text{mol}$; $\delta x = 6 \text{ mm}$ is the
 229 thickness of the two TW layers; c is the speed of light; $\gamma = 1/\sqrt{(1 - \beta^2)}$; $m_e c^2 = 0.511 \text{ MeV}$ is
 230 the electron rest mass; $W_{max} = 2m_e c^2 \beta^2 \gamma^2$ is the maximum energy transferred to an electron
 231 in one collision; and $\rho = 1.023 \text{ g/cm}^3$, $Z_S/A_S = 0.5417$ and $I = 64.7 \text{ eV}$ are the density, the
 232 effective ratio of atomic and mass number and the mean excitation potential of the scintillator
 233 material, respectively [28]. Note that the Bethe-Bloch equation for describing the mean rate of
 234 energy loss is accurate up to a few % for the beam energies considered [27].

235 For each calibration sample of Table 1, Eq. 14 was applied to all the events occurring in a
 236 TW position that was well-calibrated (see Sec. 2.4 and 2.6), obtaining the Z spectrum of the
 237 beam. The Z resolution was extracted by fitting the resulting spectrum with a Gaussian.

238 Concerning the fragmentation sample, an additional event selection was performed before
 239 applying Eq. 14. In each event, hit positions were identified by finding the crossings of the
 240 triggered bars in the two layers. If a nuclear reaction occurs, it is possible for two or more
 241 fragments to reach the TW at almost the same time, switching on multiple bars in each layer.
 242 In this case, the crossings of front and rear bars identify more positions than those actually hit
 243 by the fragments. To exclude the positions where the particles did not pass at all ('ghost hits'),
 244 we selected only those where $\Delta E_{i,F}$ and $\Delta E_{i,R}$ were similar:

$$\frac{|\Delta E_{i,F} - \Delta E_{i,R}|}{\Delta E_i} < 0.1 \quad (15)$$

245 The same selection cut was applied to the MC simulations.

246 **3. Results**

247 *3.1. Energy calibration and resolution*

248 Table 2 shows the μ and σ values of the global ΔE distributions fitted with a Gaussian for
 249 the untuned MC simulations and for the data after they were calibrated. By comparing the
 250 fifth and third column in Table 2, we see that the mean values of the data distributions are
 251 indeed close to the reference mean values of the MC distributions. For protons, a relatively
 252 large difference was found. Apparently, the simple Birks-like model was not able to accurately
 253 describe energy losses all the way down to low ΔE values, mainly relevant for low Z particles.
 254 This is not a problem, since the electronic setup of FOOT is not designed to perform precise
 255 measurements for such particles (see Sec. 1).

256 Moreover, we observe that the values for the energy resolution of the MC distribution (fourth
 257 column) are only about 1-3%, coming purely from intrinsic fluctuations, while for the data
 258 (sixth column) we found energy resolutions from 4 to 6%. The four values given in the last
 259 column for the CNAO data acquisitions were parameterized as $\sigma_{par}(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E) \approx 4.16\%$.
 260 This parameterization was used to smear the energy loss and produce the tuned MC simulations.

Table 2: Mean and sigma values obtained from Gaussian fits of the calibrated energy distributions for untuned MC simulations and data. The extracted resolution to be parameterized into the MC simulations is also given. Errors are not displayed, but fit errors on $\mu(\Delta E)$ and $\sigma(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E)$ for MC are below 0.001 MeV and 0.01%, respectively. Fit errors on $\mu(\Delta E)$ and $\sigma(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E)$ in data are below 0.07 MeV and 0.04%, respectively.

Data sample		MC		Data		For parameterization
Particle	E_{beam} [MeV/u]	$\mu(\Delta E)$ [MeV]	$\sigma(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E)$ [%]	$\mu(\Delta E)$ [MeV]	$\sigma(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E)$ [%]	$\sigma_{par}(\Delta E)$ [%]
p	60	7.12	3.43	6.27	5.72	4.58
^{12}C	115	161.1	0.96	160.7	4.00	3.88
^{12}C	260	85.77	1.86	85.12	4.73	4.36
^{12}C	400	67.29	2.50	68.58	4.70	3.98
^{16}O	400	119.9	1.91	120.5	5.19	4.82

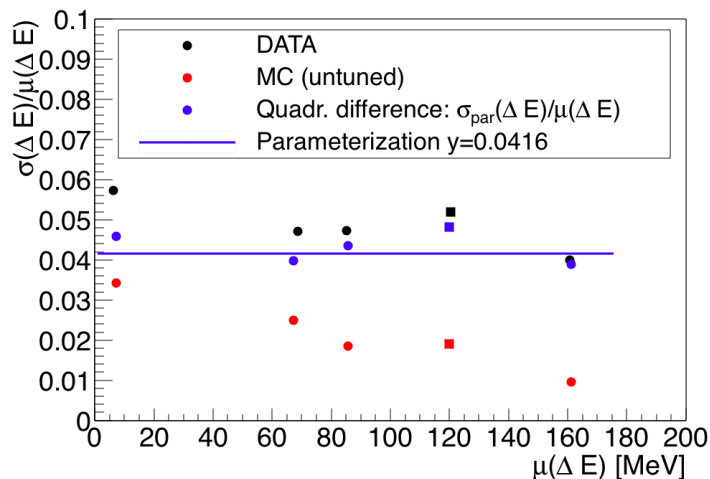


Figure 7: Energy resolution results extracted from data (black), untuned MC simulations (red) and the values obtained for $\sigma_{par}(\Delta E)/\mu(\Delta E)$ (blue). Also shown is the parameterization curve used for the Gaussian smearing of tuned MC simulations. The circle and square markers refer to the CNAO and GSI setup, respectively.

261 The data reported in Tab. 2 and the resulting parameterization used to produce the tuned MC
 262 simulations are showed in Fig. 7.

263 In Fig. 8 we show two examples (one for CNAO and one for GSI) of the energy spectrum
 264 obtained in data and tuned MC simulations. Looking at the GSI energy spectrum, we note that
 265 the width of the spectrum is slightly larger in data than in tuned MC simulations. This is because
 266 the resolution parameterization was based on CNAO data, i.e., under different experimental
 267 circumstances and with a different type of particle (see Sec. 4).

268 3.2. TOF calibration and resolution

269 In Table 3 we give the μ and σ values of TOF distributions fitted with a Gaussian for the
 270 MC simulations and for the data after they were calibrated.

271 The resolution in data ($\sigma(\text{TOF})$, sixth column) was varying from 54 ps (115 MeV/u ^{12}C) to
 272 265 ps (protons). Note that, in the case of TOF, the contribution of the intrinsic term to the
 273 overall resolution is always negligible. Thus, we have that $\sigma_{par}(\text{TOF}) = \sigma(\text{TOF})$. With these
 274 values, the parameters extracted from the fit in Eq. 11 were $A = (3.72 \pm 0.02) \cdot 10^{-1} \text{ ns}^2/\text{MeV}^2$

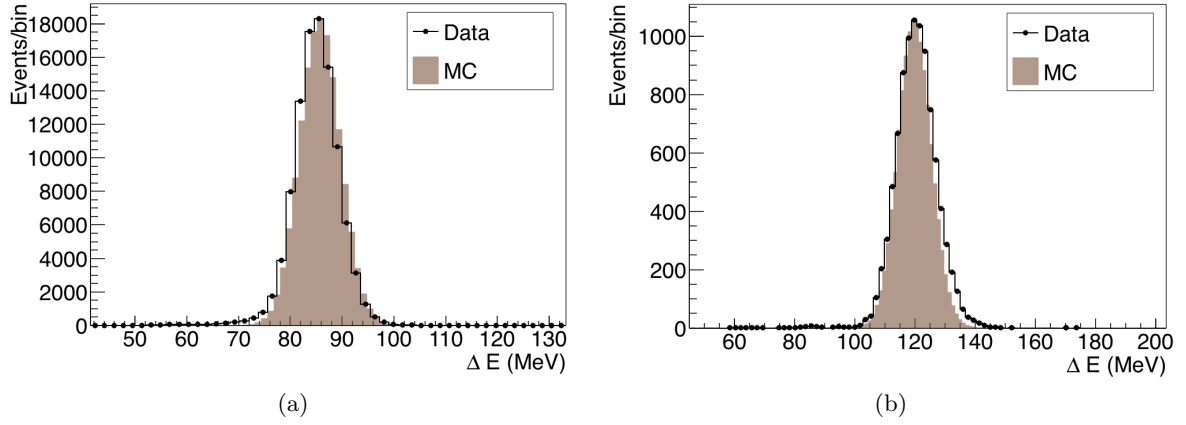


Figure 8: (a) Energy spectrum for the CNAO calibration run with 260 MeV/u ^{12}C ions, for calibrated data (black) and tuned MC (brown). (b) The same, but for 400 MeV/u ^{16}O ions at GSI.

Table 3: Mean and sigma values obtained from Gaussian fits of the calibrated TOF distributions for untuned MC simulations and data. The extracted values for resolution parameterization are also given. Uncertainties are not displayed, but fit errors on $\mu(\text{TOF})$ and $\sigma(\text{TOF})$ are below 1 ps for both MC and data.

Data sample		MC		Data		For parameterization
Particle	E_{beam} [MeV/u]	$\mu(\text{TOF})$ [ns]	$\sigma(\text{TOF})$ [ns]	$\mu(\text{TOF})$ [ns]	$\sigma(\text{TOF})$ [ns]	$\sigma_{par}(\text{TOF})$ [ns]
p	60	4.207	0.003	4.207	0.265	0.265
^{12}C	115	3.205	0.001	3.204	0.054	0.054
^{12}C	260	2.291	0.001	2.291	0.066	0.066
^{12}C	400	1.997	0.001	1.996	0.074	0.074
^{16}O	400	10.449	0.001	10.447	0.084	0.084

275 and $B = (4.0 \pm 0.2) \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ ns}^2$. The results reported in Tab. 3 and the parameterization curve
 276 used to produce the tuned MC simulations are shown in Fig. 9.

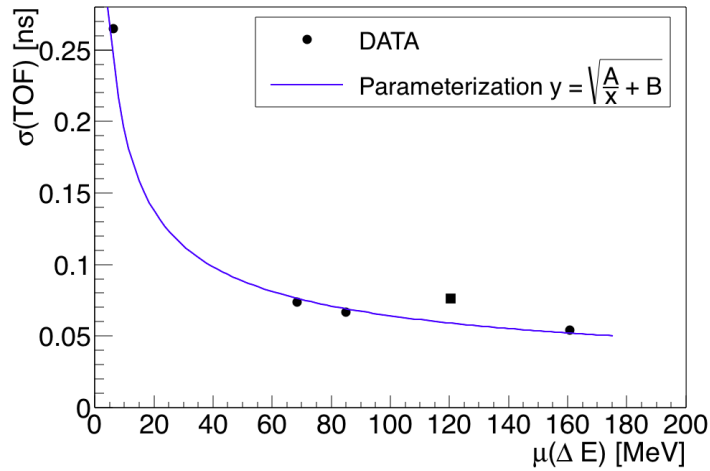


Figure 9: TOF resolution results (black) and corresponding parameterization curve (blue) used to produce the tuned MC simulations. The circle and square marker refers to the CNAO and GSI setup, respectively.

277 In Fig. 10 we show two examples for the calibrated TOF spectra, one for CNAO (10a)
 278 and one for GSI (10b). The corresponding spectra for the tuned MC simulations are also
 shown. Concerning the CNAO samples, data were seen to match well with the MC simulations.

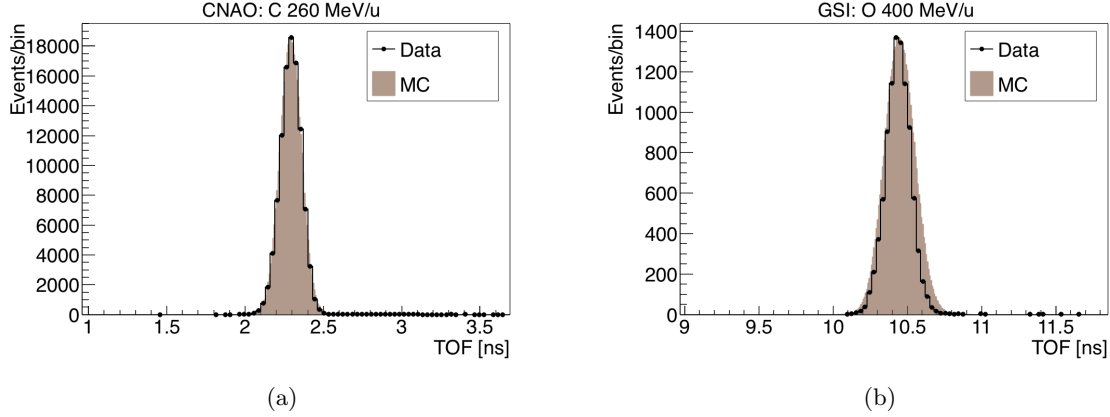


Figure 10: (a) TOF data spectra for the CNAO calibration run with 260 MeV/u ^{12}C ions, for calibrated data (black) and tuned MC simulations (brown). (b) The same, but for 400 MeV/u ^{16}O ions at GSI.

279

280 Instead, the GSI data (Fig. 10b) had a slightly larger width than the MC simulation, which
 281 can be explained by the differences in the experimental setup. In fact, the distance between the
 282 SC and the TW at GSI was much larger and other FOOT components were present, so that a
 283 parameterization based on CNAO data may not be accurate to estimate the exact behaviour of
 284 the experimental resolution at GSI.

285 Table 4 shows the contributions to the time resolution of the individual detectors. As expected,
 286 the TOF resolution is dominated by the SC because of its reduced thickness with respect
 to TW bars.

Table 4: TOF resolution of the system and relative contributions from single detectors. The results refer to all positions summed together. Errors represent fit errors.

Particle	E_{beam} [MeV/u]	$\sigma(\text{TOF})$ [ps]	$\sigma_{\text{TW}}(\text{TOF})$ [ps]	$\sigma_{\text{SC}}(\text{TOF})$ [ps]
p	60	264.9 ± 0.8	85.3 ± 0.2	250.8 ± 0.4
^{12}C	115	54.4 ± 0.1	19.7 ± 0.1	50.7 ± 0.1
^{12}C	260	66.4 ± 0.2	22.8 ± 0.1	62.4 ± 0.1
^{12}C	400	73.6 ± 0.2	24.7 ± 0.1	69.4 ± 0.1
^{16}O	400	83.9 ± 0.7	42.0 ± 0.3	72.6 ± 0.6

287

288 3.3. Charge identification

289 In Table 5 we list the μ and σ values for the Z distribution in data. In all cases, the
 290 reconstructed Z values were within a few percent of the expected charge of the primary beams.
 291 For ^{12}C and ^{16}O the obtained resolutions are compatible with the overall requirements of the
 292 experiment (see Sec. 1).

293 The extracted calibration parameters were also used to analyze the fragmentation run per-
 294 formed at GSI with ^{16}O ions on a 5 mm graphite target. The fragmentation spectrum is shown
 295 in Fig. 11. This figure shows that the differently charged fragments can be well discriminated.

Table 5: Mean and sigma values obtained from Gaussian fits of the Z distributions for data. Uncertainties are not displayed, but the fit errors on $\mu(Z)$ and $\sigma(Z)$ were below 0.002.

Particle	E_{beam} [MeV/u]	$\mu(Z)$	$\sigma(Z)$	$\sigma(Z)/\mu(Z)$ [%]
p	60	0.96	0.06	6.10 ± 0.02
^{12}C	115	6.17	0.15	2.51 ± 0.01
^{12}C	260	6.01	0.21	3.52 ± 0.01
^{12}C	400	6.07	0.24	3.85 ± 0.01
^{16}O	400	8.07	0.22	2.67 ± 0.02

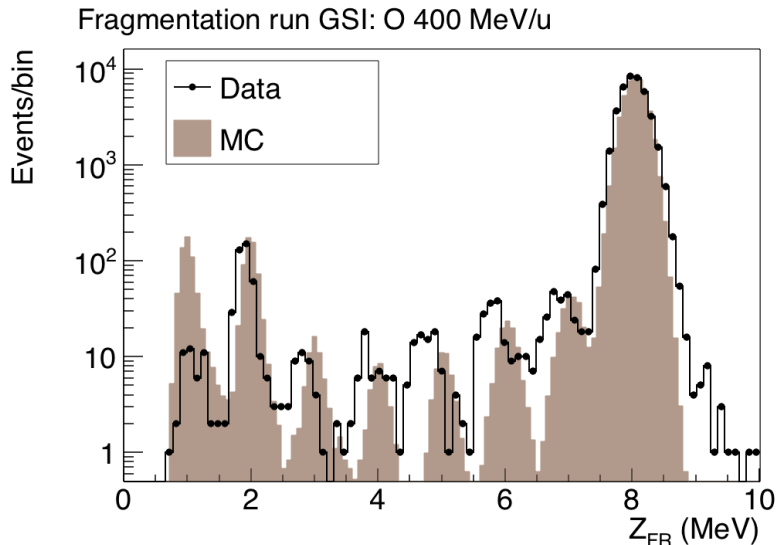


Figure 11: Z spectrum obtained from the fragmentation data of ^{16}O ions on graphite at GSI.

296 4. Discussion

297 In this work, we developed and tested a calibration method to extract the values for TOF
 298 and ΔE which are needed for charge discrimination. We also assessed the detector performances
 299 to discriminate the charge of fragments. The method was based on a position-by-position cali-
 300 bration with MC reference values. The advantage of the approach is that it is robust and precise.
 301 In fact, even if variations are present between the individual bars, for instance due to differences
 302 in optical coupling, SiPM gain, total internal reflection efficiency or possible issues in WDBs,
 303 the response of the detector could still be modeled accurately. One of the disadvantages of this
 304 method is that the TW needs to be irradiated in all the positions, meaning that enough beam
 305 time should be dedicated to the calibration of the ΔE -TOF when planning future data takings.
 306 A more elegant solution would be to investigate position dependence in the signals of the bars.
 307 Work is ongoing to improve the modeling of all the effects currently not accounted for in the
 308 MC simulations, including transport of optical photons inside the bars and SiPM response.

309 We found various issues that should be improved and investigated in-depth:

- 310 • The combination of two different experimental setups for calibration and fragmentation
 311 runs is complex and should be avoided. Small incompatibilities are expected in such
 312 situations. For future data-takings, it is better to calibrate and acquire fragmentation
 313 data under exactly the same experimental conditions.
- 314 • We noticed that the gains in the SiPMs were not fully stable, even within the same

315 experimental data setup. In particular, in various bars variations were observed in mean
316 charge up to about 3% between runs at GSI. Sensors will be added in order to monitor
317 possible fluctuations in temperature that can affect SiPM signals.

- 318 • The light output model should be studied in more detail. The response of many organic
319 scintillators varies with particle type (see e.g. [29]). Using a single curve based on the
320 most simple Birks' model to describe the collected charge of three types of particles (p,
321 C and O) over a large energy loss range (from 2 to 90 MeV on a 3 mm bar) may not be
322 fully appropriate. Several other models were tested, such as the halo model [29], but they
323 did not significantly improve the results. New data with more types of ions over a wider
324 energy range will be acquired in 2021, so that the light output model can be studied in
325 detail.
- 326 • The mechanical stability of the detector should be improved. A new prototype is under
327 construction, based on the same bars, but with a more stable frame. With this new setup,
328 the optical isolation between the bars will also be improved. This setup will be tested at
329 the end of 2020.

330 Despite the above issues, we demonstrated that TW and SC detectors together with the new
331 DAQ system were able to discriminate the fragment charges.

332 5. Conclusions

333 In this work, we proposed a charge identification procedure of nuclear fragments for the
334 first full-scale prototype of the Time-Of-Flight system of FOOT. The obtained results show
335 that the developed ΔE and TOF calibration procedures are effective and reproduce the MC
336 distributions with good accuracy. Even though it is under development, the system showed
337 promising performances in terms of both ΔE (3.9-5.3%) and TOF (50-75 ps for heavy ions,
338 250 ps for protons) resolution in view of future acquisitions with the full FOOT setup. The
339 final resolution on charge measurements is compatible with the requirements of the experiment,
340 ranging from about 6.2% for the proton beam to 2.5% for ^{12}C and ^{16}O ions.

341 The Z identification procedure has been applied for the first time with the FOOT detector to
342 study the nuclear fragments produced by the irradiation of a graphite target with a ^{16}O beam,
343 showing that the system is already able to discriminate different charged particles with good
344 accuracy.

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349 at their facilities. The GSI data were taken in the IBER 006 experiment, supported by the
350 European Space Agency (ESA) - IBER17 717 project, in the frame of FAIR Phase-0.

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