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Metamagnetic transition and a loss of magnetic hysteresis caused by electron trapping in monolayers of single-molecule magnet $Tb_2@C_{79}N^\ddagger$

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Realization of stable spin states in surface-supported magnetic molecules is crucial for their applications in molecular spintronics, memory storage or quantum information processing. In this work, we studied the surface magnetism of dimetallo-azafullerene $Tb_2@C_{79}N$, showing a broad magnetic hysteresis in a bulk form. Surprisingly, monolayers of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ exhibited a completely different behavior, with the prevalence of a ground state with antiferromagnetic coupling at low magnetic field and a metamagnetic transition in the magnetic field of 2.5–4 T. Monolayers of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ were deposited onto Cu(111) and Au(111) by evaporation in ultra-high vacuum conditions, and their topography and electronic structure were characterized by scanning tunneling microscopy and spectroscopy (STM/STS). X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), in combination with DFT studies, revealed that the nitrogen atom of the azafullerene cage tends to avoid metallic surfaces. Magnetic properties of the (sub)monolayers were then studied by X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD) at the Tb-M_{4,5} absorption edge. While in bulk powder samples $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ behaves as a single-molecule magnet with ferromagnetically coupled magnetic moments and blocking of magnetization at 28 K, its monolayers exhibited a different ground state with antiferromagnetic coupling of Tb magnetic moments. To understand if this unexpected behavior is caused by a strong hybridization of fullerenes with metallic substrates, XMCD measurements were also performed for $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ adsorbed on h-BN/Rh(111) and MgO/Ag(100). The co-existence of two forms of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ was found on these substrates as well, but magnetization curves showed narrow magnetic hysteresis detectable up to 25 K. The non-magnetic state of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ in monolayers is assigned to anionic $Tb_2@C_{79}N^-$ species with doubly-occupied Tb–Tb bonding orbital and antiferromagnetic coupling of the Tb moments. A charge transfer from the substrate or trapping of secondary electrons are discussed as a plausible origin of these species.

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Introduction

The versatility of carbon cages as robust hosts for various atoms, ions, and more complex endohedral species led to their frequent use in the design of endohedral fullerenes with unusual electronic and magnetic properties.^{1–10} The fullerene cage itself can be further modified by a substitution of carbon with heteroatoms. When a heteroatom is nitrogen, the substitution products are known as azafullerenes.^{11,12} As a nitrogen atom has one more electron than carbon, azafullerenes have a different electronic structure when compared to all-carbon fullerenes. For instance, the azafullerene $C_{59}N$ dimerizes spontaneously with the formation of a single interfullerene bond.^{12,13} Azafullerenes with endohedral metal atoms were discovered in 2008, when Dorn *et al.* isolated and structurally characterized two $M_2@C_{79}N$ compounds with $M = Y$ and Tb .¹⁴ Whereas the $C_{80}-I_h$ cage in normal endohedral metallofullerenes is stabilized by a metal-to-fullerene transfer of 6 electrons,¹⁵ replacement of one carbon by nitrogen effectively contributes one extra electron to the fullerene π -system. The endohedral unit therefore only has to transfer five electrons to the fullerene cage to stabilize its electronic structure. Thus, the formal charge distribution in dimetallo-azafullerenes is $(M_2)^{5+}@C_{79}N^{5-}$. A single valence electron in the endohedral M_2^{5+} dimer populates the M–M bonding orbital (Fig. 1a).

Dimetallo-azafullerenes form a subclass of rare-earth based dimetallofullerenes featuring a single-electron metal–metal bond.¹⁶ These molecules gained particular interest during recent years because of their interesting magnetic properties.^{17–29} Delocalization of a valence electron between two lanthanide ions results in giant magnetic coupling in the endohedral metal dimer with a formal $[M^{3+}-e-M^{3+}]$ configuration. For metal ions exhibiting axial single-ion magnetic anisotropy in these settings, like Dy and Tb , strong coupling results in robust single-molecule magnetism with enhanced blocking temperature of magnetization and very broad magnetic hysteresis.^{23–25,30} In particular, *ab initio* calculations indi-

cated that single-ion quantization axes of Tb^{3+} ions in $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ are almost parallel to the Tb – Tb axis (Fig. 1b).³⁰ The almost collinear arrangement of Tb magnetic moments and the strong ferromagnetic coupling *via* unpaired electron result in high stability of the giant-spin state and its reluctance to magnetization reversal. As a result, magnetic hysteresis in powder samples of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ was observed up to 27 K, with 100-second blocking temperature of magnetization near 24 K.³⁰ In fact, Tb -based dimetallofullerenes, $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ (ref. 30) and $Tb_2@C_{80}(CH_2Ph)$ (ref. 23), are among the strongest single-molecule magnets (SMMs) second to only some metallocenium-based SMMs,^{31–34} and show the highest hysteresis temperatures among air-stable SMMs.

An important advantage of metallofullerenes as molecular magnets is the high thermal and chemical stability of fullerene cages. It not only makes dimetallofullerenes air-stable, despite the unconventional oxidation state of endohedral lanthanides, but also allows deposition of metallofullerenes on conducting substrates by sublimation or solution-based self-assembly. Sustained magnetic bistability in a thin film, a monolayer, and eventually a single molecule in contact with a conducting substrate is an important prerequisite for the use of SMMs in nanoscale spintronics. However, a realization of hysteretic behaviour in monolayers is not straightforward and was demonstrated only for a handful of SMMs,^{35–55} including some metallofullerene-SMMs.^{56–62} The nitride clusterfullerenes $Dy_2ScN@C_{80}$ and $DySc_2N@C_{80}$ were shown to maintain their SMM properties in monolayers on metallic substrates.^{56–60} Even more promising are recent studies of $Dy_2@C_{80}(CH_2Ph)$ deposited onto graphene⁶¹ and $Tb_2@C_{80}(CH_2Ph)$ on graphene and HOPG,⁶² which demonstrated that dimetallofullerenes with single-electron lanthanide–lanthanide bonds can also sustain their superb SMM performance in monolayers. Magnetic hysteresis in these monolayers was observed at considerably higher temperatures than in all other surface-supported SMMs, reaching 28 K for a self-assembled monolayer of $Tb_2@C_{80}(CH_2Ph)$ derivative.⁶² Unlike



Fig. 1 (a) Molecular structure of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ with valence spin density isosurface corresponding to the singly-occupied Tb – Tb bonding orbital; Tb is green, N is blue, carbons are grey. (b) Alignment of magnetic moments in $Tb_2@C_{79}N$; green arrows – localized Tb -4f moments, red arrow – unpaired electron spin residing on the Tb – Tb bonding molecular orbital.



$\text{Tb}_2@C_{80}(\text{CH}_2\text{Ph})$ derivatives, $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ is free from exohedral organic group, which makes it sufficiently thermally stable for the growth of thin films by sublimation in ultrahigh-vacuum conditions. In this work, we report on the deposition of submonolayers of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ onto Au(111) and Cu(111) substrates and the electronic and magnetic properties thereof studied by scanning-tunneling microscopy, DFT calculations, and synchrotron-based X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS). The influence of the fullerene–substrate interaction on the electronic and magnetic states is further evaluated by introducing thin layers of insulators, MgO and h-BN, between fullerenes and metallic substrates.

Methods

$\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ was obtained by arc-discharge evaporation of hollow graphite rods filled with Tb_4O_7 in nitrogen-containing atmosphere and separated from other Tb-EMFs by HPLC following ref. 14 with modifications introduced in ref. 30.

The surfaces of Au(111) and Cu(111) single crystals were prepared by repeated Ar^+ -sputtering and annealing cycles. An h-BN monolayer on Rh(111) was prepared according to ref. 63 and 64, and before evaporation of fullerenes, the wafer was annealed in UHV at 1100 K for 15 min. The thin film of MgO on Ag(100) was grown by sublimation of Mg in O_2 atmosphere (10^{-6} mbar) while keeping the substrate at 645 K; the film thickness determined by XAS at the Mg-K edge was in the range of 5 monolayers.

For the surface deposition, $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ was transferred by drop-casting to a crucible of a custom-made molecular evaporator, whose design allowed reducing the distance to the substrate to 4–5 cm. The samples were degassed for several hours at 400 K under high vacuum to remove the traces of solvent. Evaporation then proceeded at 700–710 K, giving submonolayer coverage after 5 min. During evaporation of fullerenes, all substrates were kept at room temperature.

Low-temperature STM measurements were performed at the PEARL beamline⁶⁵ (Swiss Light Source, Paul Scherrer Institute) using an Omicron LT-STM microscope with the samples cooled to 4.8 K. Topography and dI/dU maps were measured in constant-current mode, while dI/dU curves were obtained in constant height mode. Spectroscopy data were measured through lock-in detection of the ac tunnel current driven by an 877 Hz, 5 mV rms signal added to the junction bias, produced by a STANFORD SR830 amplifier.

X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) measurements were also performed at PEARL for submonolayer and multilayer (*ca.* 0.3 ML and 3 ML coverage) of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ deposited onto Cu(111), the samples for XPS measurements were cooled to 77 K.

Magnetic properties of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ layers on various substrates were studied by X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD) with synchrotron radiation at the X-Treme beamline⁶⁶ (Swiss Light Source, Paul Scherrer Institute). Deposition conditions on Au(111) and Cu(111) substrates were the same as for the experiments at the PEARL beamline, and the formation

of submonolayers was confirmed *in situ* by room-temperature STM measurements shown in ESI.† In XMCD measurements, the magnetic field was collinear with the X-ray beam, and X-ray absorption was measured in the total electron yield mode. The photon flux on the sample was in the range of $0.3\text{--}4 \times 10^{-2}$ photons $\text{nm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$. Each measured spectrum was normalized to the intensity of the pre-edge signal, and then the broad background was subtracted. Thus, the XAS signal intensity reported in the paper corresponds to the normalized increase of the XAS due to the specific absorption at the Tb- $M_{4,5}$ edge over the background signal. Non-polarized XAS intensity is defined as $\text{XAS} = (I^+ + I^-)$, XMCD intensity is $(I^- - I^+)$. When XMCD intensities are plotted in %, the XMCD signal is divided by the XAS intensity at its maximum. In the measurement of magnetization curves, I^+ or I^- intensity during each magnetic field sweep was measured at fixed energies corresponding to the maximum of XMCD signal and to the pre-edge energy. In the magnetic hysteresis and angular dependence plots, the $(I^- - I^+)$ values are divided by the $(I^+ + I^-)$ sum, giving normalized XMCD, denoted as XMCD/XAS. Sum rule analysis for estimation of Tb-4f magnetic moments was performed only for $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on Au(111) and MgO|Ag(100) substrates, because the strong non-linear background of Cu(111) prevents an accurate estimation of integral values, whereas on h-BN|Rh(111) the signal-to-noise ratio was too low.

DFT modeling of the $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecule placed on Au(111), Cu(111), and MgO(100) substrates were performed at the PBE-D level with PAW potentials using the VASP 5.0 code.^{67–71} The 4f-in-core potentials used for Tb allowed DFT calculation without explicit treatment of 4f electrons. Metallic Cu(111) and Au(111) substrates were modelled as slabs of 6 atomic layers with lateral unit cells of 12.76 Å (Cu) and 14.43 Å (Au). MgO(100) was described by 4 atomic layers with the lateral unit cell of 12.65 Å. At these intermolecular distances, fullerene–fullerene interactions are presumed to be rather weak. In the course of optimization, both the fullerene and the substrate atomic positions were refined; uncertainty of the relative energies with the numerical settings used in the calculations did not exceed 2 meV. Atomic charges were derived from DFT-computed electronic densities using Bader code.⁷² Simulations of magnetization curves were performed with PHI code.⁷³

Surface deposition and STM characterization of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on Au(111) and Cu(111)

Topographies of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ layers deposited onto Au(111) and Cu(111) are shown in Fig. 2 (see also Fig. S1–S9 in ESI† for additional data). As common for fullerenes on metallic surfaces,⁷⁴ $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecules on Cu(111) exhibit sufficiently high mobility on the surface of the room temperature substrate to diffuse over the atomically flat terraces. Step edges of the metal substrate act as preferential starting points for the fullerene island growth, eventually leading to stripes of fullerene islands anchored to the step-edges, although some islands were also found on the substrate terraces. Due to the hcp arrangement of the molecules, a pronounced tendency to hexa-





Fig. 2 Topographic images of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ submonolayer islands on: (a–c) $\text{Cu}(111)$, and (d–f) $\text{Au}(111)$. (a) Overview of the submonolayer on $\text{Cu}(111)$; (b) zoom into the fragment marked by dashed square; (c) further magnification and height profile along the dashed line. (d) Narrow fullerene islands on the $\text{Au}(111)$ crystal fragment with many step edges. (e) On $\text{Au}(111)$ crystal with larger terraces; (f) magnification of one region on the terrace and the height profile along the dashed line. The characteristic herringbone reconstruction pattern on $\text{Au}(111)$ surface can be also seen in (f) along with defects (presumably missing atoms) on the vertices of the herringbone pattern. All measurements are performed at 4.8 K. Measurement parameters on $\text{Cu}(111)$: $U = +0.8$ V, $I = 20$ pA (a and b) and $I = 100$ pA (c); on $\text{Au}(111)$: $U = +0.6$ V, $I = 20$ pA (d), $U = -0.5$ V, $I = 10$ pA (d, inset), $U = 1$ V, $I = 20$ pA (e and f).

gonally shaped islands is clearly seen (Fig. 2). An onset of the second layer growth is seen on many of the monolayer islands, even though there is still a large area of bare metallic substrate. This is rather uncommon for fullerenes, which usually preferentially cover the whole metallic surface.

On the fragment of the $\text{Au}(111)$ crystal with many edge-steps, $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecules arrange into arrays of narrow aligned stripes (Fig. 2d and Fig. S8†). This indicates that deposition onto vicinal surfaces may be used in future to create aligned fullerene ribbons with controlled width.⁷⁵ On the larger $\text{Au}(111)$ terraces, the morphology of the $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ submonolayer is similar to that on $\text{Cu}(111)$ except for a much smaller degree of the second layer formation (Fig. 2e and f). Lateral and vertical parameters of the islands on $\text{Au}(111)$ are similar to those on $\text{Cu}(111)$. The apparent height of fullerene molecules determined from height profiles measured at the bias voltage of +0.8 V is $7.5(1)$ Å, whereas the lateral size of the hexagonal monolayer lattice is $10.7(3)$ Å.

Further details of the electronic structure near the Fermi level were studied by scanning tunneling spectroscopy (STS); for technical reasons, the measurements were limited to the ± 1 V window. The spectra measured on several $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ islands on $\text{Cu}(111)$ can be divided into three groups with

slightly different position of the HOMO peak varying between -0.58 V and -0.64 V (Fig. 3a and Fig. S5†). In the LUMO range, no well-defined peaks can be seen. Instead, dI/dU grows continuously with the increase of the bias voltage above +0.5 V. The transport gap in the $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ monolayer on $\text{Cu}(111)$ varies in the range of 1.05–1.12 V. The measurements did not reveal pronounced features near the Fermi level.

Measurements over a double-layer of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ demonstrate a completely different STS profile with the peak at +0.5 V, presumably derived from the LUMO and accompanied by a negative differential conductance feature at the more positive bias (Fig. 3a and Fig. S6†). The transport gap for the double layer is increased beyond 1.5 V, and the HOMO-derived peak cannot be observed in the available voltage window. Both the negative differential conductance and the increase of the gap are consistent with the double-layer structure. Similar phenomena were observed in STM studies of fullerene C_{60} decoupled from metallic substrates, either in C_{60} double layers or in C_{60} deposited on top of other organic molecules.^{76–79}

A $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ monolayer on $\text{Au}(111)$ has a similar STS pattern to that on $\text{Cu}(111)$ with a well-defined HOMO peak, a flat region around the Fermi level, and a steady increase of dI/dU above +0.6 V (Fig. 3b and Fig. S9†). For one of the islands,





Fig. 3 (a) Top: dI/dU curves measured over $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ islands on $Cu(111)$ over the first layer (three different types) and over the 2nd layer; bottom: dI/dU curves measured over $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ monolayer island on $Au(111)$, shown in (b). The curves are averaged over three different molecular types described in (b) and (c), and for the sake of comparison are normalized to the current of the HOMO peak. (b) Topography of the $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ monolayer island on $Au(111)$ (the molecules on which dI/dU curves were measured are marked by encircled 1, 2, and 3, $U = -0.632$ V, $I = 20$ pA); (c) dI/dU map of the same fragment at $U = -0.632$ V, $I = 20$ pA, $dU = 0.5$ mV rms.

we performed dI/dU mapping at $U = -0.632$ V, near the HOMO-derived peak. Whereas topography of the island shows similar height for all fullerene molecules (Fig. 3b), the dI/dU map reveals strong inhomogeneity with considerable variation of the brightness between different molecules (Fig. 3c). STS measurements at different molecules showed the variation of the HOMO peak from -0.45 to -0.61 eV as well as the variation of the transport gap from 0.95 to 1.18 V (Fig. 3a and Fig. S9[†]). We tentatively assign this variability to the different orientations of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ molecules in monolayers as well as different coordination geometry of the cage and metal substrate (the cells of the fullerene monolayer and metallic substrates are not commensurate). Similar variability of the MO peak caused by different molecular orientations was found in a C_{60} monolayer on $Cu(100)$.⁸⁰ Interestingly, the variation of the energies and the gap is more pronounced on $Au(111)$ than on $Cu(111)$, showing that $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ molecules are more ordered on copper. This agrees with the results of XMCD studies discussed below, which show a considerably higher degree of ordering of Tb_2 dimers in monolayers on $Cu(111)$.

XPS and valence-band PES

DFT calculations discussed below showed that among the studied substrates, $Cu(111)$ exhibits the strongest interactions with $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ molecules. Thus, $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ deposited on $Cu(111)$ was studied by XPS using excitation at 800 eV. In addition to a submonolayer with a coverage of approximately 0.3 ML as estimated by STM, the measurements were also performed for a multilayer sample with a thickness of about 3 ML.

The N 1s signal of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ is found at the binding energy of 401 eV. Neither the peak energy nor its shape changes with the level of coverage (Fig. 4a). This indicates that the nitrogen site of the azafullerene is not involved in the strong interaction with the copper substrate. Presumably, the molecules are landing on $Cu(111)$ with the nitrogen oriented upside to avoid its contact with the metallic substrate (see results of DFT calculation below). The N 1s binding energy in

$Tb_2@C_{79}N$ is close to the N 1s binding energy in nitrogen-substituted C-sp² compounds. For instance, pyridinic (6-membered ring) and pyrrolic (5-membered ring) nitrogen gives XPS signals at 398.3 ± 0.3 eV and 400.1 ± 0.3 eV,⁸¹ respectively, N-substituted graphene/graphite has a peak at 400–402 eV, whereas the N 1s binding energy in azafullerene $C_{59}N$ is 400.7 eV.^{81,82} For comparison, the N 1s binding energy of the endohedral nitride ion (N^{3-}) in metallofullerenes of the $M_3N@C_{2n}$ family is noticeably lower, 396–397 eV: 396.1 eV in $Sc_3N@C_{78}$,⁸³ 396.9 eV in $Sc_3N@C_{80}$,⁸⁴ and 396.8 eV in $TbSc_2N@C_{80}$.⁸⁵

The C 1s photoemission peak of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ multilayer has a maximum at 284.6 eV and full width at half-maximum of 1.1 eV. The peak energy is somewhat lower than in C_{60} (285.0–285.2 eV)^{86,87} or in metallofullerenes $M_3N@C_{80}$ with C_{80-I_h} cage (285.2 eV for $M = Sc$,⁸⁴ 285.4 eV for $M = Tm$,⁸⁸ 285.9 eV for $M = Dy$).⁸⁹ The linewidth as well as the asymmetric shape of the peak is in line with those of EMFs with C_{80} fullerene cage.^{84,85,88,89} The C 1s peak of $Tb_2@C_{79}N$ shows noticeable variation of the band shape and increase of the binding energy by ca. 0.2 eV when going from 3 ML to 0.3 ML coverage. Presumably, the fullerene–substrate interactions have a non-negligible influence on the C 1s core levels, unlike the N 1s level of the cage nitrogen. But the shift is not sufficiently strong to make a definitive conclusion on its nature. For comparison, in C_{60} adsorbed on $Ag(110)$, a system with a strong fullerene–metal interactions and a sizeable charge transfer, the C 1s peak shifts to a lower binding energy by 0.7 eV on going from a monolayer to a multilayer coverage.⁹⁰

We also studied valence-band photoelectron spectra (PES) using X-ray excitation with photon energy $h\nu_{ex}$ varied in the 1228–1242 eV range. At $h\nu_{ex} = 1228$ eV, the PES spectrum is dominated by occupied states of Cu with strong peaks at the binding energies of 1.5–5.5 eV. Carbon and terbium have very small cross sections at this excitation energy. But when $h\nu_{ex}$ is scanned through the $Tb-M_5$ ($3d \rightarrow 4f$) absorption edge, the resonantly enhanced $Tb-4f$ photoemission appears at 5–15 eV





Fig. 4 (a and b) XPS spectra of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on Cu(111) in the N 1s (a) and C 1s (b) energy range, measurements are performed at 77 K with excitation at 800 eV for submonolayer (~ 0.3 ML, red curves) and multilayer (~ 3 ML, blue curves); dashed red curves are spectra of the submonolayer sample scaled to match intensity of the multilayer. (c) Valence band photoelectron spectra with excitation at 1228 eV (off-resonance, magenta) and at 1237.4 eV (in resonance with $3d \rightarrow 4f$ excitation of Tb at the M_5 edge) compared to theoretical intensity of $4f^8 \rightarrow 4f^7$ ionization transitions as calculated by Gerken⁹¹ (cyan, vertical bars are individual transition, and the curve is Gaussian broadening with the peak width of 0.6 eV). Blue dotted curve is the difference between in-resonance and off-resonance spectra. The inset shows variation of the PES intensity with the excitation photon energy between 1234 and 1241 eV measured with the step of 0.2 eV.

below the Fermi level. The strongest Tb-4f emission is observed at $h\nu_{\text{ex}} = 1237.4$ eV (Fig. 4c). The Cu-based photoemission intensity remains virtually constant at these excitation energies. The spectra of 0.3 ML and 3 ML samples have the same resonant Tb-4f photoemission profile, which points to the absence of a strong interaction between Tb-4f electrons and the substrate. This is not surprising in the view of the localized nature of 4f electrons and shielding of endohedral Tb ions by the fullerene cage. The electron escape depth is short and most of the signal comes from the outermost layers. As a result, when the coverage of the substrate is increased from 0.3 to 3 ML, the resonant PES signal of Tb-4f increased considerably, whereas that of copper substrate decreased almost twice.

Off-resonance $4f^8 \rightarrow 4f^7$ photoemission intensity was computed by Gerken using the intermediate interaction model.⁹¹ According to his results, ionization of Tb^{3+} should give a stand-alone peak at the $4f^7$ ground state ($^8S_{7/2}$) and a complex multiplet at higher energies, between 4 and 8 eV above the $^8S_{7/2}$ -derived transition. The predicted multiplet structure corresponds well to a peak at 10.1 eV and a double peak at 12.1/12.9 eV below the Fermi level in the resonant PES spectrum of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$. At the same time, the $^8S_{7/2}$ transition does not appear as sharp and well-resolved as predicted by theory. Instead, subtraction of the off-resonance spectrum leaves a broad band with multiple unresolved features at the binding energies of 5–7 eV. Presumably, the difference may be caused by the resonance nature of the spectra. Note that earlier the same theory gave very good agreement with X-ray valence band PES spectra of metallofullerenes $\text{Dy}_3\text{N}@C_{80}$,⁸⁹ $\text{Tm}_3\text{N}@C_{80}$,⁹² and $\text{Tm}@C_{82}$ ⁹³ excited with Al $K\alpha$ radiation (1486.6 eV). At that energy, the cross section of lanthanides is also very high, but there is no resonance with Dy- M_5 or Tm- M_5 absorption edges.

Computational modeling

DFT calculations were performed to understand how interactions with metallic substrates can affect the molecular ordering and electronic structure of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$. In particular, we aimed to understand how the presence of the nitrogen atom in the fullerene cage affects the adsorption geometry of the molecule. Another question of interest was how Tb_2 dimers are preferentially oriented inside the fullerene cage when it interacts with a substrate. Computations of an isolated $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecule revealed that the nitrogen atom is located at the [5,6,6] position and that metal atoms tend to avoid close contact with nitrogen.^{14,30} The lowest energies were found then for the conformers, in which Tb_2 atoms are located on the plane oriented perpendicular to the axis passing through the center of mass (CM) and the nitrogen atom. At the same time, rotation of the metal dimer in this plane leads to small energy variations, indicating that there is a certain flexibility for the dimer position. Our earlier theoretical studies of surface-supported $\text{Dy}_2\text{ScN}@C_{80}$ molecules showed that metallic substrates exhibit a significant orientational effect on the endohedral cluster.⁵⁷ The latter tends to orient itself parallel to the surface to avoid interactions of endohedral metal atoms with a surface-contacted fragment of the fullerene cage. To summarize, these findings show that a reliable study of metallofullerene on the surface should consider various degrees of freedom of the whole molecule as well as its endohedral unit.

For a comprehensive description of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on Cu(111), Au(111), and MgO(100) substrates, we generated 240 starting configurations of an adsorbed $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecule with different positions of the nitrogen and endohedral Tb_2 dimer on each substrate⁹⁴ and optimized them at the DFT level (see Methods for further details and ESI† for details of structure generation). Even with this large number of structures, complete sampling cannot be guaranteed because the parameter



space is immense, but it is representative enough to find general trends in the preferable configurations. Two angles defined in Fig. 5a are used in the further discussion to parameterize the $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ structure on the surface. The angle between the Tb_2 bond and the normal to the substrate z is denoted as $\phi(\text{Tb}_2-z)$; the values of ϕ close to 90° correspond to the parallel orientation of the Tb_2 dimer *versus* the surface. The nitrogen position with respect to the substrate is described by the angle $\theta(\text{N-CM}-z)$ between the N-CM axis and the normal to the surface z ; small values of θ correspond to the nitrogen atom facing the surface, whereas the values close to 180° correspond to the nitrogen facing upwards. Note that for the vast majority of optimized structures, the angle between the Tb_2 bond and N-CM axis is within the 75° – 90° range.

Fig. 5b–d and Fig. S12† plot distributions of $\phi(\text{Tb}_2-z)$ and $\theta(\text{N-CM}-z)$ angles in optimized structures, whereas their relative energies are encoded in the color of the dots. The range of the relative energies obtained for optimized conformers depends considerably on the substrate. For an isolated $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecule, the conformers span the energy range of 100 meV.³⁰ For adsorbed molecules, the range of the energies increases to 860 meV (on Cu) and 770 meV (on Au). On the insulating MgO(100), the spread of values is reduced to 320 meV, which is still significantly higher than for the isolated molecule.

There is a clear tendency to avoid landing configurations, in which the nitrogen atom of the azafullerene cage is in close contact with the metal substrate. All structures with $\theta(\text{N-CM}-z)$ less than 20° are among the least stable configurations on



Fig. 5 (a) Definition of the $\phi(\text{Tb}_2-z)$ and $\theta(\text{N-CM}-z)$ angles for an adsorbed $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecule, CM is the center of mass, z is the normal to the surface, Tb atoms are shown as green spheres; (b–d) distribution of ϕ and θ angles in DFT optimized structures of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecules adsorbed on Cu(111) (b), Au(111) (c), and MgO(100) (d) with their color-coded relative energies. Red and blue arrows point to the most and least stable structures, respectively. (e) Difference of the electron density for the $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecule adsorbed on Au(111) (blue and red isosurfaces mark areas with decrease and increase of the electron density, respectively). (f) Spin density distribution for the structure plotted in (e).





Fig. 6 Tb-M₅ XAS (top panels) and XMCD (bottom panels) spectra of Tb₂@C₇₉N submonolayers (~0.2 ML coverage) on Au(111) (a) and Cu(111) (b). $T \approx 2$ K, $\mu_0 H = 6.8$ T, grazing (30°) and normal (90°) X-ray and magnetic field incidence with respect to the surface. I^+ and I^- are circular polarized XAS spectra, non-polarized XAS is defined as a sum ($I^+ + I^-$), XMCD is defined as a difference ($I^- - I^+$), normalization to the maximum of XAS gives XMCD in %.

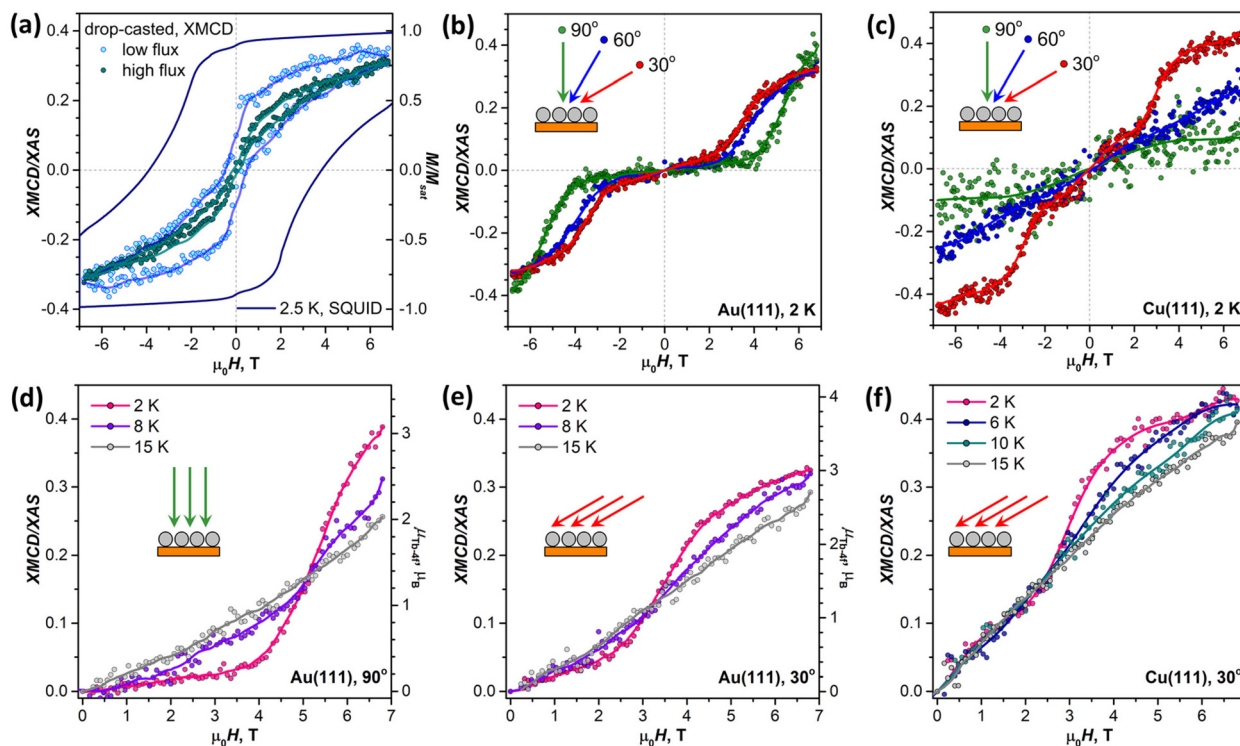


Fig. 7 (a) Magnetic hysteresis of powder Tb₂@C₇₉N measured by SQUID magnetometry (solid line) compared to the hysteresis in Tb₂@C₇₉N multilayer drop-casted onto Au crystal and measured by XMCD with two different X-ray fluxes (sweep rate 0.2 T min⁻¹ for SQUID and 2 T min⁻¹ for XMCD measurements, $T \approx 2$ K, X-ray flux is varied from 0.3×10^{-2} to 2×10^{-2} photons nm⁻² s⁻¹, respectively). (b) Magnetization curves of Tb₂@C₇₉N submonolayer on Au(111) measured by XMCD with three different incidence angles, $T \approx 2$ K, the field was ramped from +6.8 T to -6.8 T and back to +6.8 T. (c) Magnetization curves of Tb₂@C₇₉N submonolayer on Cu(111) measured by XMCD with three different incidence angles, $T \approx 2$ K. (d) Averaged magnetization curves of Tb₂@C₇₉N submonolayer on Au(111) measured at different temperatures in normal incidence (90°). (e) Averaged magnetization curves of Tb₂@C₇₉N submonolayer on Au(111) measured at different temperatures in grazing incidence (30°). (f) Averaged magnetization curves of Tb₂@C₇₉N submonolayer on Cu(111) measured at different temperatures in grazing incidence (30°). In all panels, dots are experimental measurements, whereas lines are smoothed experimental data shown to guide the eye; data shown in (d-f) are averaged over four segments ([0 → 6.8 T], [0 → -6.8 T], [6.8 T → 0], and [-6.8 T → 0]). Tb-4f magnetic moment scale (μ_{Tb-4f}) in (d) and (e) is obtained from a sum rule analysis.



easy-axis magnetic anisotropy in a disordered monolayer, which is not surprising given the fact that the magnetization is not saturated yet in this field (Fig. 7).

Similar switching between afm and fm states is found in submonolayer of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on Cu(111). The switching field in grazing incidence is also close to 2.5 T as for Au(111). However, the transition between afm and fm states is not as pronounced as on Au(111). Besides, the sample on Cu(111) shows higher residual magnetization in smaller fields indicating that the molecules with afm and fm ground state can co-exist on Cu(111).

When temperature is increased from 2 K to 15 K (Fig. 7d–f), the transition between afm and fm states becomes less sharp. Presumably, the fm state becomes more thermally accessible at smaller fields, when it is still higher in energy than the afm state. At the same time, magnetization in higher fields, when the fm state is dominant, is smaller because the system requires a higher field to reach the saturation.

$\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ films on h-BN|Rh(111) and MgO|Ag(100)

To decrease the electronic coupling of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecules with the substrate, we then used a thin layer of semiconductor (monolayer h-BN on Rh(111)) or insulator (5 ML of MgO on Ag(100)). Fullerene layers on these substrates were prepared by thermal evaporation. For MgO(5 ML)|Ag(100), the evaporation was carried out at a higher temperature and gave 1.5 ML coverage as determined by comparison of Tb-M_{4,5} XAS intensity to that of TbPc_2 on MgO|Ag(100) from ref. 46 and 51. Tb-M₅ XAS and XMCD spectra of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on both substrates are shown in Fig. 8. The measurements in grazing incidence give a somewhat higher XMCD signal, indicating a slight preference of the parallel orientation of Tb_2 dimer with respect to the surface, but the effect is less pronounced than on Cu(111) in Fig. 6b.

In Fig. 9, magnetization curves measured at 2 K are compared to 30 K measurements. The concave shape of the low-temperature curves again points to the prevalence of the afm state in low fields, although it should co-exist with a fraction of molecules with large magnetic moment. Thus, the electronic decoupling of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecules from metals does not eliminate the afm ground state for some of them. At 30 K, magnetization curves show more typical outward curvature in the whole field range. Gradual transition from inward to outward curvature can be seen at intermediate temperatures (15 K and 25 K in Fig. 9c and d). Sum rule analysis for 30 K and 6.8 T gives the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ values of $3 \pm 0.5\mu_B$, similar to the estimation on Au(111). It is clear from the shape of the magnetization curves that the magnetization is not saturated at this field. At lower temperatures, the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ values at 6.8 T are even smaller (Fig. 9 and 10).

At 2 K, $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on h-BN|Rh(111) and MgO|Ag(100) exhibits narrow magnetic hysteresis. Hysteresis on MgO|Ag(100) remains open up to 25 K (Fig. 9d). No hysteresis can be found at 30 K (Fig. 9a and b). The closing temperature of hysteresis in $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on MgO|Ag(100) agrees with bulk magnetic measurement of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}^{30}$ as well as bulk and monolayer measurements in monolayers of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{80}(\text{CH}_2\text{Ph})$ derivatives on graphitic substrates.⁶²

The origin of the antiferromagnetic state

The afm ground state of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ monolayers found in XMCD measurements was completely unexpected. Strong ferromagnetic coupling of Tb moments in $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ is caused by the unpaired valence electron delocalized between two Tb ions (Fig. 1). The change of the magnetic ground state may indicate that the Tb–Tb bonding orbital changed its occupation by acquiring an additional electron (Fig. 10a). Earlier,



Fig. 8 Tb-M₅ XAS (top panels) and XMCD (bottom panels) spectra of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ evaporated onto h-BN|Rh(111) (left) and MgO|Ag(100) (right). $T \approx 2$ K, $\mu_0H = 6.8$ T, grazing (30°) and normal (90°) X-ray and magnetic field incidence with respect to the surface. I^+ and I^- are circular polarized XAS spectra, non-polarized XAS is defined as a sum ($I^+ + I^-$), XMCD is defined as a difference ($I^- - I^+$), normalization to the maximum of XAS gives XMCD in %.





Fig. 9 (a) Magnetization curves of a $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ submonolayer on $h\text{-BN}|\text{Rh}(111)$ at 2 K and 30 K. (b) Magnetization curves of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ 1.5 ML on $\text{MgO}|\text{Ag}(100)$ at 2 K and 30 K. (c and d) Magnetic hysteresis of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ 1.5 ML on $\text{MgO}|\text{Ag}(100)$ measured at 15 K (c) and 25 K (d). All curves are measured in grazing incidence (30°); magnetic field sweep rate is 1.5 T min^{-1} ; dots are experimental measurements, lines are smoothed experimental data and are shown to guide the eye only; arrows denote the measurements during decrease (\downarrow) and increase (\uparrow) of the magnetic field; Tb-4f magnetic moment scale ($\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$) is obtained from a sum rule analysis.

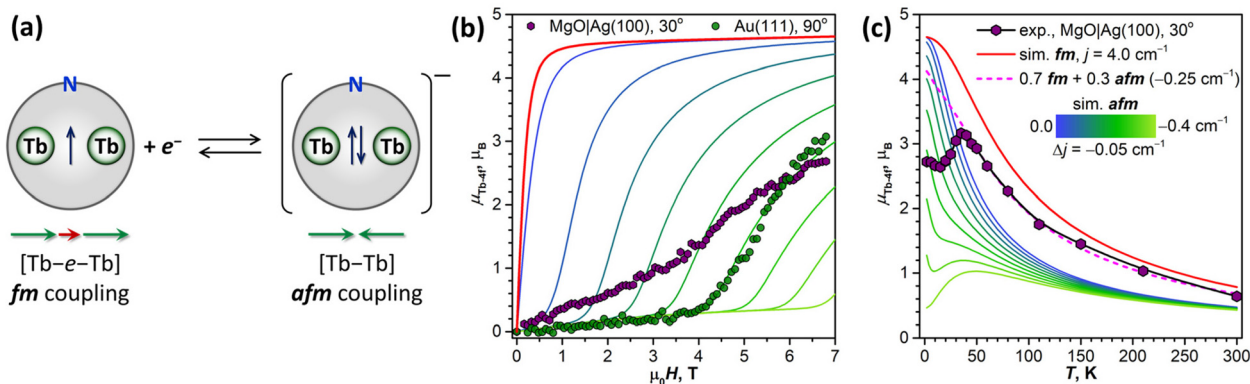


Fig. 10 (a) Schematic description of the electron trapping by the SOMO of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ leading to $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}^-$ anion with two-fold occupied Tb-Tb bonding MO and antiferromagnetic coupling of magnetic moments; green arrows denote Tb-4f magnetic moments, red arrow denotes magnetic moment of the unpaired valence electron. (b) Magnetization curves of $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ on $\text{MgO}|\text{Ag}(100)$ and $\text{Au}(111)$ measured at $T \approx 2\text{ K}$ and compared to the results of simulations for fm and afm coupling of Tb-4f magnetic moments, the coloring scheme is the same as in (c). (c) Temperature dependence of Tb-4f magnetic moment in $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ 1.5 ML on $\text{MgO}|\text{Ag}(100)$ measured by XMCD at 6.8 T in grazing incidence and compared to the results of simulations for ferromagnetic (fm) and antiferromagnetic (afm) coupling of Tb-4f magnetic moments with different values of the coupling constant j_{12} ; dashed line is a simulation for a mixture of molecules with fm (70%) and afm (30%) ground states.

we demonstrated that single-electron reduction of dimetallofullerenes $\text{M}_2@C_{80}(\text{CH}_2\text{Ph})$ in solution leads to stable anions with two-fold occupied M-M bonding orbital and reduced magnetic anisotropy.^{16,23} In the absence of an unpaired valence electron, lanthanide-lanthanide interactions *via* two-electron M-M bond are presumably antiferromagnetic

(Fig. 10a). Thus, unusual magnetic behavior is not caused by intact $\text{Tb}_2@C_{79}\text{N}$ molecules, but results from the trapping of an extra electron.

Reduction of adsorbed fullerenes could be caused by their strong hybridization with the metallic substrate and an electron transfer from the metal to the Tb-Tb bonding SOMO, as



eqn (1) vanishes, and the spin Hamiltonian is reduced to a simple form:

$$\hat{H}_{\text{spin}} = \hat{H}_{\text{LF}'} + \hat{H}_{\text{LF}''} - 2j_{12}\hat{J}_{\text{Tb}}\hat{J}_{\text{Tb}''} + \hat{H}_{\text{ZEE}}. \quad (2)$$

In the first approximation, we assume that the ligand field terms for Tb ions in $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ and $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ are similar, which allows the use results of *ab initio* calculations from ref. 30 in further modelling. Since XMCD at the Tb-M_{4,5} edge allows determination of Tb-4f moments only, we can use eqn (2) as an effective Hamiltonian for the neutral $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ as well. The correct energy of the $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ state with antiparallel alignment of Tb-4f moments is then obtained with the j_{12} constant of 4 cm^{-1} . Following *ab initio* predictions, the quantization axes of the two Tb ions in $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ are misaligned by 8° .

Fig. 10b shows simulated powder-averaged magnetization curves of $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ obtained with the Hamiltonian in eqn (2) and j_{12} values in the range of 0 to -0.4 cm^{-1} for $T = 2 \text{ K}$. The shape of the curves with small magnetization at low field and fast increase above the threshold field corresponds well to the data measured for $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ adsorbed on Au(111). The j_{12} value of -0.25 cm^{-1} gives the zero-field energy difference between afm and fm-coupled states of 36 cm^{-1} (4.5 meV) and the threshold field of 4.1 T. For other substrates, the $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ anion alone with afm ground state cannot reproduce magnetization data, which is probably caused by a coexistence of $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ anion and neutral $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ molecules.

The coexistence of two types of species with different magnetic ground states can be further inferred from the temperature dependence of the Tb-4f magnetic moment, which was measured for $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ on MgO|Ag(100) substrate in the field of 6.8 T. Between 2 K and 15 K, the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ value decreased slightly from 3.0 to $2.9\mu_{\text{B}}$, then increased to reach its maximum of $3.4\mu_{\text{B}}$ at 35 K, and then showed gradual decrease at higher temperatures to the value of $0.7\mu_{\text{B}}$ at 300 K (Fig. 10c). Note that the sum rule analysis gives the error up to $0.5\mu_{\text{B}}$ due to uncertainty in integration limits and background, but the relative values of XMCD intensities are much more precise. We therefore determined the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ value from the sum rule analysis at 35 K and estimated other points from their relative XMCD intensities at the Tb-M₅ edge.

The peak in the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}(T)$ dependence is only possible with the afm state ($j_{12} < 0$) contribution because the fm ground state ($j_{12} > 0$) is characterized by a gradual decay of $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ in the whole temperature range. However, we cannot reproduce the shape of the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}(T)$ curve with Hamiltonian (2) and any single j_{12} value. The peak in simulated $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}(T)$ curves develops only for j_{12} values more negative than -0.4 cm^{-1} , but simulated $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ values in the peak maximum are around 3 times smaller than experimental ones. At temperatures above 35 K, the experimental $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}$ is considerably larger than calculated for any negative j_{12} , but smaller than for $j_{12} = 4 \text{ cm}^{-1}$. In fact, the part of the curve above 35 K can be reproduced by a combination of two species, neutral $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ with j_{12} of 4 cm^{-1} and $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ anion with j_{12} of -0.25 cm^{-1} in a

$0.7:0.3$ ratio (Fig. 10c). This ratio is only qualitatively estimated because of uncertainties of sum rule analysis, but the prevalence of the neutral $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ at higher temperatures is evident.

Thus, the shape of the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}(T)$ curve with a peak at 35 K cannot be explained by any constant composition of the sample, and we suggest that the ratio between $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ and $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ is changing with temperature. If the anionic state is metastable, as it would be if it were formed by the electron trapping, its lifetime should depend on the rate of the electron hopping between neighboring molecules. In molecular solids, the hopping is often an activated process with a certain energy barrier. Thus, when the hopping is activated, the $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ fraction in the sample may decrease considerably, which would lead to the increase of the average magnetic moment and appearance of the peak in the $\mu_{\text{Tb-4f}}(T)$ curve.

Conclusions

In this work, we presented the first study of surface magnetism in lanthanide dimetallo-azafullerene monolayers on different substrates. In contrast to the single-molecule magnetism of the bulk $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ with strongly ferromagnetic intramolecular coupling, its monolayers showed unexpected antiferromagnetic coupling between Tb magnetic moments. The coupling is moderately strong, and the ferromagnetically-coupled state becomes prevalent in higher magnetic fields. The origin of the antiferromagnetic ground state in a monolayer is presumably the formation of $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}^-$ anions with two-fold occupied Tb-Tb bonding orbital. The anions can be formed either by an electron transfer from the substrate or, more likely, by trapping secondary electrons formed in the course of X-ray absorption measurements. The coexistence of neutral and anionic species exhibiting different magnetic properties and the variation of their ratio with temperature and as a function of the substrate result in unconventional magnetization behavior of $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ monolayers. On substrates with thin dielectric layers, h-BN|Rh(111) and MgO|Ag(100), we observed narrow magnetic hysteresis, presumably originating from the neutral $\text{Tb}_2@\text{C}_{79}\text{N}$ molecules.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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