



# Bilinear-biquadratic anisotropic Heisenberg model on a triangular lattice

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 13 November 2012

Received in revised form

21 January 2013

Available online 8 April 2013

### Keywords:

Heisenberg model

Antiferromagnet

Quantum phase transition

## ABSTRACT

Motivated by the fact that the study of disordered phases at zero temperature is of great interest, I study the spin-one quantum antiferromagnet with a next-nearest neighbor interaction on a triangular lattice with bilinear and biquadratic exchange interactions and a single ion anisotropy, using a SU(3) Schwinger boson mean-field theory. I calculate the critical properties, at zero temperature, for values of the single ion anisotropy parameter  $D$  above a critical value  $D_C$ , where a quantum phase transition takes place from a higher  $D$  disordered phase to a lower  $D$  ordered phase.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of frustrated magnetic systems has experienced a burst of theoretical and experimental activity in the last decade since it presents an excellent ground to discover new states and new properties of matter [1–3]. In this context, the synthesis of new materials has motivated a lot of theoretical studies in the two dimensional  $S=1$  Heisenberg antiferromagnet on the triangular lattice [4–11]. The triangular lattice antiferromagnet is of interest because of its potential to exhibit exotic phases, and because there are many real materials with this structure. The inclusion of a single ion anisotropy and a biquadratic exchange interaction leads to a model exhibiting a complex phase diagram. Interest in spin-quadrupolar ordering has been raised recently by experimental findings in the layer compound  $\text{NiGa}_2\text{S}_4$ , where the  $\text{Ni}^{2+}$  ions are in the  $S=1$  state, and form a two-dimensional triangular lattice [1]. In this paper I will study the model described by the following Hamiltonian:

$$H = J \cos \theta \sum_{\langle n,m \rangle} S_n S_m + J_2 \sum_{\ll n,m \gg} S_n S_m + J \sin \theta \sum_{\langle n,m \rangle} (S_n S_m)^2 + D \sum_n (S_n^z)^2, \quad (1)$$

where  $\langle \rangle$  sums over the nearest-neighbors and  $\ll \gg$  over the next-nearest neighbors. It is usual to write  $J_1 \equiv J \cos \theta$ ,  $K = J \sin \theta$ , where the parameter  $\theta$  control the ratio of these two couplings. Here  $J_1$  and  $J_2$  denote the antiferromagnetic exchange coupling between spins located in the nearest neighbor and next-nearest neighbor sites respectively, and  $K$  is the coupling for the biquadratic interaction between nearest neighbor spin pairs. Although a

negative  $K$  can be obtained from a large  $U$  expansion of the multi-orbital Hubbard model, or from coupling to phonons, both signs of  $K$  are possible.

A negative biquadratic exchange  $K$  tends to drive the spins to a collinear state, while a positive biquadratic term induces a state which is minimized with mutually perpendicular spins.

Let us first mention what is known about Hamiltonian (1) when  $J_2=0$ ,  $D=0$ . This model has been extensively studied in the literature [8,10], where it has been shown that it has four different phases at zero temperature. The ferromagnetic (FM) phase for  $\pi/2 < \theta < -3\pi/4$ . The ferroquadrupolar (FQ) phase, with collinear ferro-nematic order, i. e. nematic order that does not break lattice translational symmetry, for  $-3\pi/4 < \theta < \theta$ . In this phase the  $O(3)$  spin symmetry is broken but  $\langle \mathbf{S}_n \rangle = 0$ . The  $120^\circ$  antiferromagnetic (AFM) phase for  $\theta < \theta < \pi/4$ , and finally the antiferroquadrupolar (AFQ) phase for  $\pi/4 < \theta < \pi/2$ , where the ground state is described by an antiferro-nematic order, and the director vectors  $\mathbf{d}_n$  on three different sublattices are orthogonal to each other, thus breaking lattice translation symmetry. A mean field variational calculation gives  $\theta = \arctan(-2) \approx -1.099$ , while a finite-size exact-diagonalization strongly renormalizes this value to  $\theta = -0.3456$  ( $K/J_1 \approx -0.4$ ).

For  $D \gg J_1, J_2, |K|$ , the ground state is a trivial product of states of  $|S^z=0\rangle$  on all sites (corresponding to the trivial single-site ferro nematic order) separated by a gap from the first excited states, which lie in the sectors  $S_{\text{total}}^z = \pm 1$ . Therefore, there exists a critical  $D_C$  denoting a quantum phase transition from the large- $D$  phase to the small  $D$ -phase [12–14].

The introduction of a competitive second-neighbor interaction  $J_2$  leads, at intermediate values of this parameter, to the existence of a disordered phase. In this paper, I will be interested in the case where  $D$  is above  $D_C$ , this is, in the nematic phase. In Section 2, I present a SU(3) Schwinger boson formalism that is adequate to treat spin-1 systems with competing bilinear  $J_1$  and  $J_2$  exchanges

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interactions, biquadratic exchange interaction  $K$ , and single ion anisotropy. In Section 3, I describe an approximation to the above formalism convenient to treat the disordered phases. Finally, in Section 4, I present the results of my calculations.

## 2. SU(3) Schwinger boson formalism

It is impossible to describe the spin nematic phase using the standard SU(2) Schwinger boson (SB) formalism as a boson condensate, because a nonzero condensate  $z=\langle a \rangle$  (where  $a$  is one of the Schwinger bosons) necessarily produces a nonzero magnetic dipole moment with size  $|m|=|z|^2/2$ . To avert this shortcoming of the SB formalism, Papanicolaou [15] derived a theory where one additional boson was introduced. The new theory is a generalization SU(3) of the SU(2) Schwinger boson-mean field theory where both, magnetic order and spin nematic order can be described by a boson condensate.

In this formalism, we start by choosing the following basis:

$$|x\rangle = i(|1\rangle - |-1\rangle)/\sqrt{2}, \quad |y\rangle = (|1\rangle + |-1\rangle)/\sqrt{2}, \quad |z\rangle = |-i0\rangle, \quad (2)$$

where  $|n\rangle$  are eigenstates of  $S^z$ , and representing the spin operators via a set of three boson operators  $t_\alpha$  ( $\alpha=x, y, z$ ) defined by

$$t_x^+|v\rangle = |x\rangle, \quad t_y^+|v\rangle = |y\rangle, \quad t_z^+|v\rangle = |z\rangle, \quad (3)$$

where  $|v\rangle$  is the vacuum state, with the constraint

$$t_x^+t_x + t_y^+t_y + t_z^+t_z = 1, \quad (4)$$

for single site occupancy on each site. In terms of the  $t$  operators we can write

$$S^\alpha = -i\epsilon_{\alpha\beta\gamma}t_\beta^+t_\gamma. \quad (15)$$

As pointed out by Li and Shen [5], one may choose the operators  $t$ 's as either bosons, or fermions. In principle, the bosons tend to condense to the lowest energy state at low temperatures and form a quantum ordered state, while the fermions tend to form a Fermi sea and a quantum-disordered state. It can easily be verified that

$$[S^\alpha, S^\beta] = i\epsilon_{\alpha\beta\gamma}S^\gamma. \quad (16)$$

The states  $t_x^+|v\rangle$  and  $t_y^+|v\rangle$ , both consist of  $S^z = \pm 1$  eigenstates and have the average  $\langle S^z \rangle = 0$ . This property will preserve the disorder of the ground state.

It should be noted that Wang et al. [16] arrived at the same representation starting from the bond operator representation of  $S=1/2$ , proposed by Sachdev and Bhatt [17], with the singlet state projected out.

To study the disordered phase, it is convenient to introduce another two bosonic operators  $u^+$  and  $d^+$  given by [12]

$$u^+ = -\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(t_x^+ + it_y^+), \quad d^+ = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(t_x^+ - it_y^+), \quad (7)$$

so that

$$|1\rangle = u^+|v\rangle, \quad |0\rangle = t_z^+|v\rangle, \quad |-1\rangle = d^+|v\rangle, \quad (8)$$

with the constraint  $u^+u + d^+d + t_z^+t_z = 1$ . There is no new physics involved here; this replacement only makes easy the calculations. The spin operators can now be written as

$$S^+ = \sqrt{2}(t_z^+d + u^+t_z), \quad S^- = \sqrt{2}(d^+t_z + t_z^+u), \quad S^z = u^+u - d^+d. \quad (9)$$

Writing the operators  $t$ 's as a vector  $\mathbf{t}=(t_x, t_y, t_z)^T$ , we have

$$S_n = -i\mathbf{t}_n^+ \mathbf{t}_n. \quad (10)$$

Using the  $t$ 's operators, the Hamiltonian (1) can be rewritten as

$$H = \sum_{\langle n,m \rangle} [J_1 \mathbf{t}_n^+ (\mathbf{t}_n \mathbf{t}_m^+) \mathbf{t}_m + (J_1 - K) (\mathbf{t}_n^+ \mathbf{t}_m^+) (\mathbf{t}_n \mathbf{t}_m) + K] + J_2 \sum_{\langle\langle n,m \rangle\rangle} [\mathbf{t}_n^+ (\mathbf{t}_n \mathbf{t}_m^+) \mathbf{t}_m + (\mathbf{t}_n^+ \mathbf{t}_m^+) (\mathbf{t}_n \mathbf{t}_m)] + \sum_n [\mu(1 - n_n) + D(1 - n_{na})], \quad (11)$$

where  $n_{na} = t_{na}^+ t_{na}$  is the particle number operator for bosons of type  $\alpha$  on site  $n$ , and  $n_n = \sum_\alpha n_{na}$ .

To discuss quadrupolar order, it is useful to introduce the quadrupole operators [8,10]

$$\begin{aligned} Q_n^{(0)} &= (S_n^z)^2 - \frac{2}{3} = \frac{1}{3}(t_{nx}^+ t_{nx} + t_{ny}^+ t_{ny} - 2t_{nz}^+ t_{nz}), \\ Q_n^{(2)} &= (S_n^x)^2 - (S_n^y)^2 = -(t_{nx}^+ t_{nx} - t_{ny}^+ t_{ny}), \\ Q_n^{xy} &= S_n^x S_n^y + S_n^y S_n^x = -(t_{nx}^+ t_{ny} + t_{ny}^+ t_{nx}), \\ Q_n^{yz} &= S_n^y S_n^z + S_n^z S_n^y = -(t_{ny}^+ t_{nz} + t_{nz}^+ t_{ny}), \\ Q_n^{zx} &= S_n^z S_n^x + S_n^x S_n^z = -(t_{nz}^+ t_{nx} + t_{nx}^+ t_{nz}). \end{aligned} \quad (12)$$

The nematic order parameters  $Q^{np}$  describes the anisotropy of spin fluctuations, not static moment, and can be nonzero only if  $S \geq 1$  [6].

Joshi et al. [7] have used the SU(3) Schwinger boson formalism, condensing the bosons associated with the ordering, to study the FQ phase (with  $J_2=0, D=0$ ). For instance, to describe a state with all directors pointing in the  $y$  direction, they let the  $y$  bosons condense and replace  $t_y^+$  and  $t_y$  by  $\sqrt{1 - t_x^+ t_x - t_z^+ t_z}$ .

Peng Li et al. [4] studied the region  $\pi/4 < \theta < \pi/2$  (for  $D=0, J_2=0$ ) starting from Eq.(11) and doing a decoupling using two real mean-field parameters, just like in the SU(2) Schwinger boson mean field theory. They found that the condensation of the SU(3) bosons led to a gapless nematic phase. In this phase the spin moments vanish, i. e. the nematic state is non-magnetic, whereas the uniform quadrupole moment  $\langle Q_n^{xy} \rangle$  is nonzero at zero temperature, which indicates the existence of a quadrupolar long-range order.

Serbin et al. [18], using a fermionic representation within a mean field theory, studied the Hamiltonian (1), with  $J_2=0$ , in the antiferromagnetic phase,  $-0.4 \leq K/J_1 \leq 1$ , for small values of  $D$ . In addition to a fully gapped spin-liquid ground state, they found a state where one gapless triplon mode coexists with topological gapped spin excitations. Spin liquid phases for spin-1 system on a triangular lattice were recently found by Xu et al. [9].

The aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of the next nearest neighbor exchange interaction  $J_2$  and the single ion anisotropy  $D$ , in the disordered phase, to the biquadratic model on the triangular lattice. The effect of the  $J_2$  term, as far as I know, has not been studied before. The contribution of the single ion term was considered by Serbin et al. [18], but only for small values of  $D$  ( $|D|, |K| < J_1$ ). Therefore, the results presented here, even for  $\eta=0$ , are new ones. In this sense, my calculations complement those performed in Ref. [18].

## 3. The large $D$ phase

An adequate approximation to the SU(3) SB formalism in the disordered phase is to suppose that the  $t_z$  bosons are condensed [12,16], i. e.  $\langle t_z \rangle = t$ . I remark that when  $\langle t_z \rangle < 1$ , this condensation does not mean that every spin is in the eigenstate of  $S^z=0$ , although  $\langle \sum_n S_n^z \rangle = 0$ . The Hamiltonian (11) can be written as

$$H = H_0 + H_1 + H_2^{mf} \quad (13)$$

where

$$H_0 = (1 - t^2)DN + \frac{zNK}{2}(1 + t^4) + \mu \sum_n (u_n^+ u_n + d_n^+ d_n + t^2 - 1) \quad (14)$$

$$\begin{aligned} H_1 &= J_1 t^2 \sum_{\langle n,m \rangle} (u_n^+ u_m + d_n^+ d_m + h.c.) \\ &\quad + (J_1 - K) t^2 \sum_{\langle n,m \rangle} (u_n^+ d_m^+ + d_n^+ u_m^+ + h.c.) \\ &\quad + J_2 t^2 \sum_{\langle\langle n,m \rangle\rangle} (u_n^+ u_m + d_n^+ d_m + u_n^+ d_m^+ + d_n^+ u_m^+ + h.c.), \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

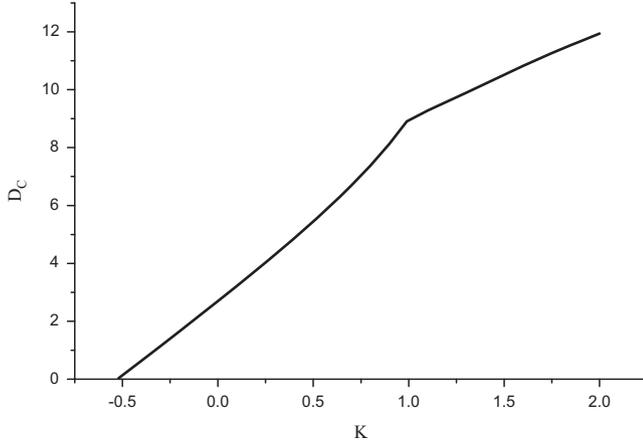


Fig. 1. The critical parameter  $D_C$  as a function of  $K$ , for  $\eta=0$ .

and after a mean-field decoupling to the four operator terms  $H_2^{mf}$  is given by

$$H_2^{mf} = -2(J_1 - K) \sum_{(n,m)} [p(u_n^+ d_m^+ + d_n^+ u_m^+) + h.c.] + \frac{zN}{2} [J_1(1-t^2)^2 + 4(J_1 - K)p^2]. \quad (16)$$

here  $p = \langle u_n d_m \rangle$  and  $\tilde{p}$  has the same expression, but connect the next nearest neighbor spins. I have found that both terms are very small and can be neglected, but I present the equation for these terms below.

After a Fourier–Bogoliubov transformation we get the final result

$$H = \sum_q \omega_q (\alpha_q^+ \alpha_q + \beta_q^+ \beta_q) + \sum_k (\omega_k - \Lambda_k) + \text{constant}, \quad (17)$$

with

$$\omega_q = \sqrt{\Lambda_q^2 - \Delta_q^2} \quad (18)$$

$$\Lambda_q = \lambda + 6t^2 g_q, \quad \Delta_q = 6(g_q - \gamma_q K)t^2, \quad g_q = \gamma_q + \eta \tilde{\gamma}_q, \quad \eta = J_2/J_1. \quad (19)$$

$$\gamma_q = \frac{1}{3} \left\{ \cos q_x + 2 \cos \left( \frac{q_x}{2} \right) \cos \left( \frac{\sqrt{3} q_y}{2} \right) \right\}, \quad (20)$$

$$\tilde{\gamma}_q = \frac{1}{3} \left\{ \left[ \cos(\sqrt{3} q_y) + 2 \cos \left( \frac{3q_x}{2} \right) \cos \left( \frac{\sqrt{3} q_y}{2} \right) \right] \right\} \quad (21)$$

The energy gap in the disordered phase ( $D \geq D_C$ ) occurs at a wave vector  $\mathbf{q}_0$ , which is directly related to the ordered state introduced by the Bose–Einstein condensation of magnons. For small values of  $\eta$  and  $K \leq J_1$ ,  $\mathbf{q}_0$  is given by,  $\mathbf{q}_0 = (4\pi/3, 0)$ . At  $\mathbf{q}_0$  a quantum phase transition takes place from the disordered large  $D$  phase to the ordered small  $D$  phase.

Following Ref. [14] and extending their calculations to my case, I obtain the saddle-point equations at  $T=0$

$$t^2 = 2 - \frac{1}{N} \sum_q \frac{\Lambda_q}{\omega_q}, \quad (22)$$

$$D - \lambda - 6Kt^2 + 6(1 + \eta)(1 - t^2) = \frac{6}{N} \sum_q \frac{(\Lambda_q - \Delta_q)g_q + K\Delta_q\gamma_q}{\omega_q}, \quad (23)$$

$$p = -\frac{1}{2N} \sum_q \frac{\gamma_q \Delta_q}{\omega_q}, \quad \tilde{p} = -\frac{1}{2N} \sum_q \frac{\tilde{\gamma}_q \Delta_q}{\omega_q}. \quad (24)$$

The self-consistent equations can then be written as

$$t^2 = 2 - \frac{1}{N} \sum_q \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 - \Gamma_q^2}}, \quad (25)$$

$$-D + \frac{2}{g} + 12K = \frac{1}{N} \sum_q \frac{6[(g_q - K\gamma_q)\Gamma_q - g_q] + 1/g + 6K}{\sqrt{1 - \Gamma_q^2}}, \quad (26)$$

where

$$\Gamma_q = \frac{6(g_q - K\gamma_q)g}{1 + 6gg_q}, \quad \text{and} \quad g = t^2/\lambda. \quad (27)$$

here I have set  $J_1 = 1$ . The  $\eta=0, K=1$  case is special: one finds  $t^2 = 1$ , meaning that all spins occupy the state  $|S^z = 0\rangle$ .

At the phase transition point  $D_C$ , the energy gap goes to zero and the minimum gap appears at  $\mathbf{q} = (4\pi/3, 0)$ . We find at this point

$$D_C = \frac{2}{g_c} + 12K - \frac{1}{N} \sum_q \frac{6K + 1/g_c + 6(g_q - K\gamma_q)\Gamma_q - g_q}{\sqrt{1 - \Gamma_q^2}}, \quad (28)$$

where  $g_c$  is given by

$$g_c = \frac{1}{6[2(1/2 - \eta) - K/2]}, \quad (29)$$

for  $K \leq 1$ . While for  $K > 1$  it takes the value,  $g_c = 1/3 K$ .

#### 4. Results and conclusions

In Fig. 1, I show the critical parameter  $D_C$ , below which a quantum phase transition to an ordered phase takes place, as a function of the biquadratic interaction  $K$ , for  $\eta=0$ , up to  $K=2$ .  $D_C$  vanishes at  $K_C = -0.52$  signaling a transition to the FN phase. This value should be compared with  $K_C = -0.4$  obtained by Lauchli et al. [8] using a finite-size exact diagonalization calculation. In Fig. 2, I present the gap  $m$ , which is Eq. (16) evaluated at  $\mathbf{q} = (4\pi/3, 0)$ , as a function of  $K$ , for  $D=10$  and  $\eta=0$ , and  $\eta=0.1$ . As one can see, the gap decreases linearly with  $K$ . Figs. 3 and 4 show the critical parameter  $D_C$  as a function of  $\eta$ , for  $K=-0.1$  and  $K=0.3$  respectively.  $D_C$  vanishes at the points  $\eta_c = 0.0885$  and  $\eta_c = 0.103$  respectively. The biquadratic exchange drives the critical point  $\eta_c$  toward lower values of  $\eta$  for  $K < 0$ , and toward higher values of  $\eta$  for  $K > 0$ .

To show the behavior of the nematic order in the large  $D$  region, I present some calculations for  $Q = -Q_n^{(0)}$ . In Figs. 5 and 6, it is shown  $Q$  as function of  $K$ , for  $\eta=0$ , evaluated at  $D=D_C$  and  $D=10$  respectively. For large values of  $D$ ,  $\langle (S^z)^2 \rangle$  tends to be zero, as it should, and  $Q \rightarrow 0$ .

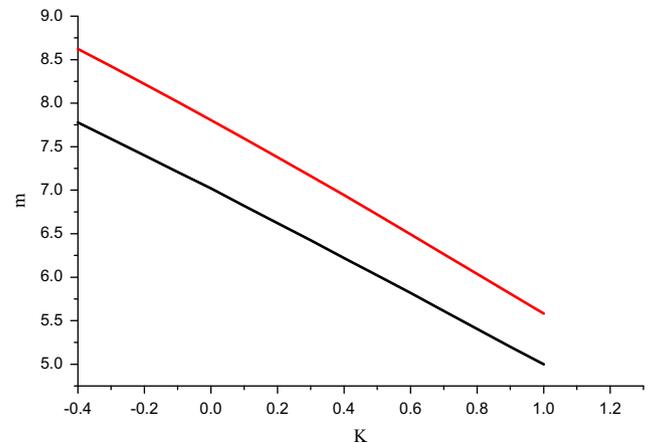


Fig. 2. The gap as a function of  $K$ , for  $D=10$ , and  $\eta=0$  (lower line),  $\eta=0.1$  (upper line).

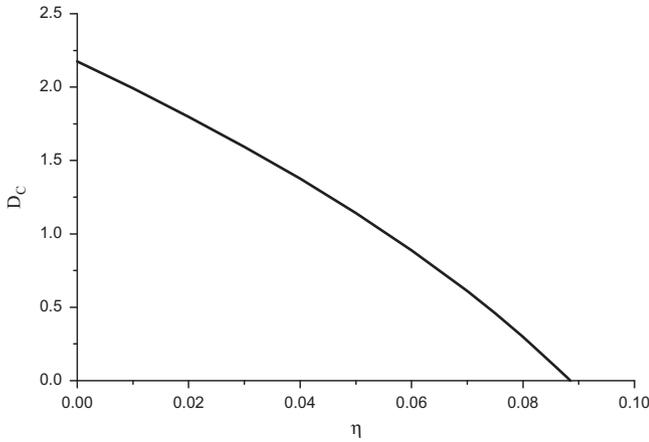


Fig. 3. The critical anisotropy parameter  $D_c$  as a function of  $\eta$  for  $K=-0.1$ .

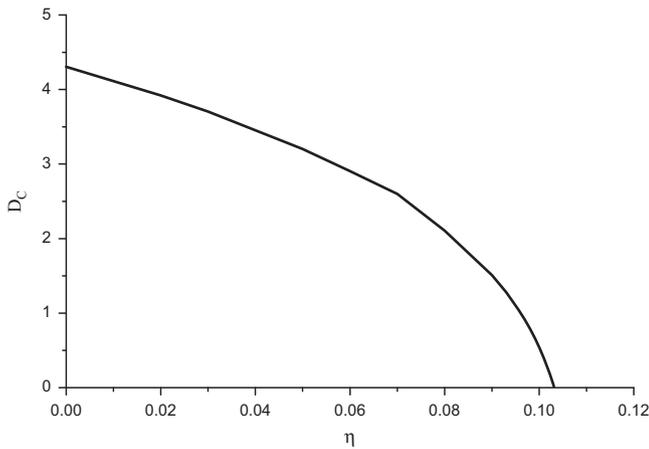


Fig. 4. The critical anisotropy parameter  $D_c$  as a function of  $\eta$  for  $K=0.3$ .

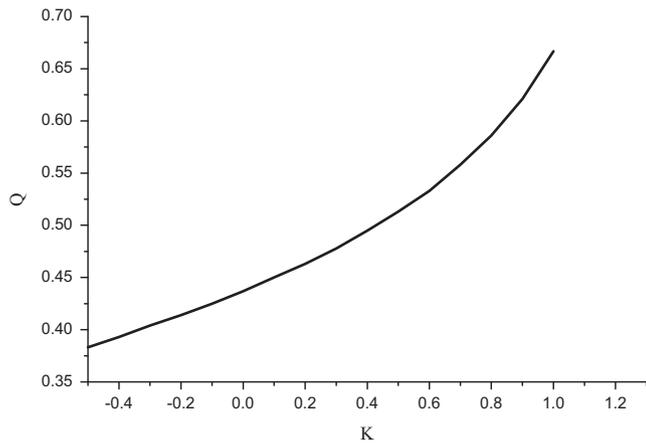


Fig. 5.  $Q$  as a function of  $K$ , for  $\eta=0$ , evaluated at  $D_c$ .

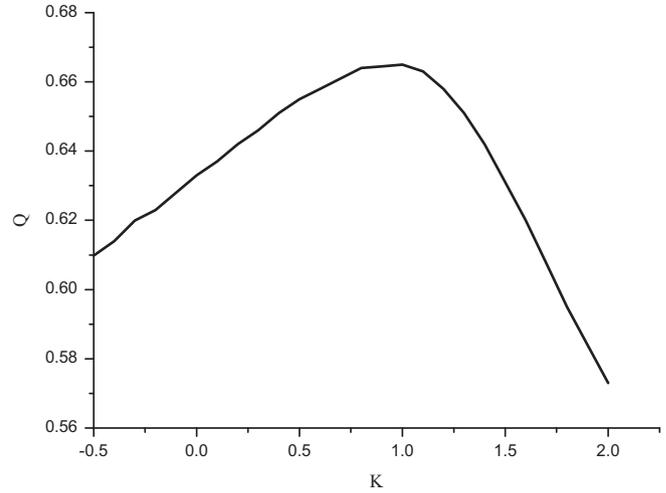


Fig. 6.  $Q$  as a function of  $K$ , for  $\eta=0$ , and  $D=8$ .

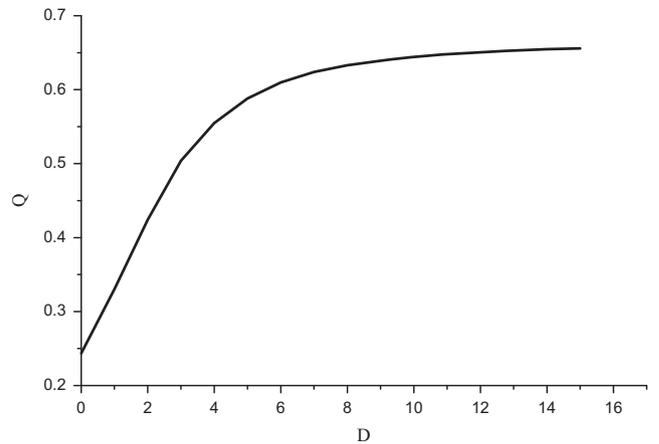


Fig. 7.  $Q$  as a function of  $D$ , for  $K=0$ , in the disordered region  $\eta=0.12$ .

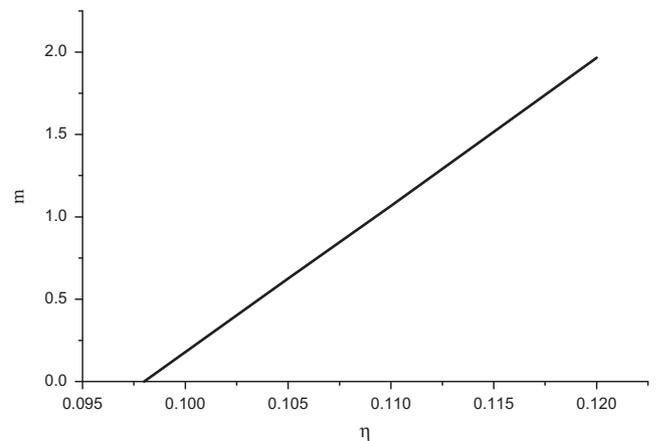


Fig. 8. The gap  $m$  in the disordered region as a function of  $\eta$ , for  $K=0$ .

In Fig. 7, I show  $Q$  as a function of  $D$ , for  $K=0$  and  $\eta=0.12$ . For this value of  $\eta$  we have  $D_c=0$  and so the ground state is disordered. However,  $Q=0.243$  at  $D=0$ , indicating the presence of a nematic phase, and not of a spin liquid state. Wang et al. [16], using the same formalism that I have used here, also found a non zero value for  $Q$  for the spin  $-1$  antiferromagnetic chain. Fig. 8 shows the gap  $m$  as a function of  $\eta$ , for  $K=0$ . It vanishes at the critical point  $\eta_c=0.098$ , and increases linearly with  $\eta$  for  $\eta > \eta_c$ .

To provide a general qualitative overview, I plot in Figs. 9 and 10 the spin wave dispersion for  $\eta=0$ ,  $D=5$ ,  $K=-0.4$ , and  $\eta=0$ ,  $D=8$ ,  $K=0.5$ , respectively.

The purpose of this paper was to enlarge the study of the two-dimensional  $S=1$  Heisenberg antiferromagnet on a triangular lattice. In this context, I have studied the nematic region where the single ion

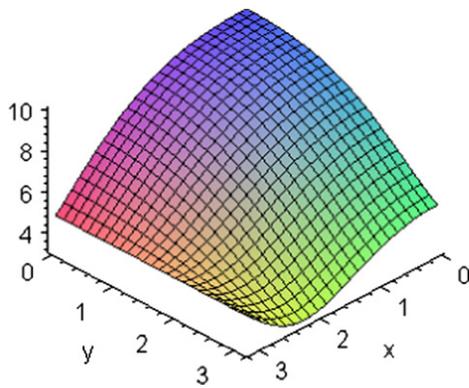


Fig. 9. The spin wave dispersion  $\omega_q$  is shown for  $\eta=0$ ,  $D=5$ ,  $K=-0.4$ .

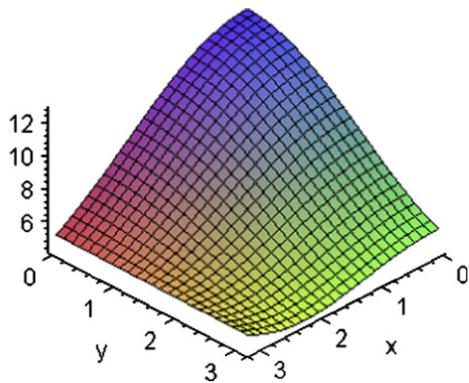


Fig. 10. The spin wave dispersion  $\omega_q$  is shown for  $\eta=0$ ,  $D=8$ ,  $K=0.5$ .

anisotropy parameter  $D$  is above the critical value  $D_C$  where a quantum phase transition takes place to a low  $D$  phase. I assumed that one kind of boson was condensed and studied the ground-state properties of the model using a mean field approximation. Kaul [19] using quantum Monte Carlo simulations, has confirmed that the  $S=1$  biquadratic model on a triangular lattice has a spin nematic ground state. As pointed out by Perc et al. [10], up to now unambiguous experimental evidence for spin-nematic phases in real materials is still

lacking, but given the numbers of system currently been studied, it is expected that such evidence will emerge in the near future.

## Acknowledgments

This work was partially supported by Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPQ) and Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG).

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