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B. Aubert, Marcella Bona, D. Boutigny, Y. Karyotakis ...+569 more authors

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Study of  $B$  Meson Decays with Excited  $\eta$  and  $\eta'$  Mesons

B. Aubert,<sup>1</sup> M. Bona,<sup>1</sup> D. Boutigny,<sup>1</sup> Y. Karyotakis,<sup>1</sup> J. P. Lees,<sup>1</sup> V. Poireau,<sup>1</sup> X. Prudent,<sup>1</sup> V. Tisserand,<sup>1</sup> A. Zghiche,<sup>1</sup> J. Garra Tico,<sup>2</sup> E. Grauges,<sup>2</sup> L. Lopez,<sup>3</sup> A. Palano,<sup>3</sup> M. Pappagallo,<sup>3</sup> G. Eigen,<sup>4</sup> B. Stugu,<sup>4</sup> L. Sun,<sup>4</sup> G. S. Abrams,<sup>5</sup> M. Battaglia,<sup>5</sup> D. N. Brown,<sup>5</sup> J. Button-Shafer,<sup>5</sup> R. N. Cahn,<sup>5</sup> Y. Groysman,<sup>5</sup> R. G. Jacobsen,<sup>5</sup> J. A. Kadyk,<sup>5</sup> L. T. Kerth,<sup>5</sup> Yu. G. Kolomensky,<sup>5</sup> G. Kukartsev,<sup>5</sup> D. Lopes Pegna,<sup>5</sup> G. Lynch,<sup>5</sup> L. M. Mir,<sup>5</sup> T. J. Orimoto,<sup>5</sup> I. L. Osipenko,<sup>5</sup> M. T. Ronan,<sup>5,\*</sup> K. Tackmann,<sup>5</sup> T. Tanabe,<sup>5</sup> W. A. Wenzel,<sup>5</sup> P. del Amo Sanchez,<sup>6</sup> C. M. Hawkes,<sup>6</sup> A. T. Watson,<sup>6</sup> T. Held,<sup>7</sup> H. Koch,<sup>7</sup> M. Pelizaeus,<sup>7</sup> T. Schroeder,<sup>7</sup> M. Steinke,<sup>7</sup> D. Walker,<sup>8</sup> D. J. Asgeirsson,<sup>9</sup> T. Cuhadar-Donszelmann,<sup>9</sup> B. G. Fulsom,<sup>9</sup> C. Hearty,<sup>9</sup> T. S. Mattison,<sup>9</sup> J. A. McKenna,<sup>9</sup> M. Barrett,<sup>10</sup> A. Khan,<sup>10</sup> M. Saleem,<sup>10</sup> L. Teodorescu,<sup>10</sup> V. E. Blinov,<sup>11</sup> A. D. Bukin,<sup>11</sup> V. P. Druzhinin,<sup>11</sup> V. B. Golubev,<sup>11</sup> A. P. Onuchin,<sup>11</sup> S. I. Serednyakov,<sup>11</sup> Yu. I. Skovpen,<sup>11</sup> E. P. Solodov,<sup>11</sup> K. Yu. Todyshev,<sup>11</sup> M. Bondioli,<sup>12</sup> S. Curry,<sup>12</sup> I. Eschrich,<sup>12</sup> D. Kirkby,<sup>12</sup> A. J. Lankford,<sup>12</sup> P. Lund,<sup>12</sup> M. Mandelkern,<sup>12</sup> E. C. Martin,<sup>12</sup> D. P. Stoker,<sup>12</sup> S. Abachi,<sup>13</sup> C. Buchanan,<sup>13</sup> S. D. Foulkes,<sup>14</sup> J. W. Gary,<sup>14</sup> F. Liu,<sup>14</sup> O. Long,<sup>14</sup> B. C. Shen,<sup>14</sup> L. Zhang,<sup>14</sup> H. P. Paar,<sup>15</sup> S. Rahatlou,<sup>15</sup> V. Sharma,<sup>15</sup> J. W. Berryhill,<sup>16</sup> C. Campagnari,<sup>16</sup> A. Cunha,<sup>16</sup> B. Dahmes,<sup>16</sup> T. M. Hong,<sup>16</sup> D. Kovalskyi,<sup>16</sup> J. D. Richman,<sup>16</sup> T. W. Beck,<sup>17</sup> A. M. Eisner,<sup>17</sup> C. J. Flacco,<sup>17</sup> C. A. Heusch,<sup>17</sup> J. Kroseberg,<sup>17</sup> W. S. Lockman,<sup>17</sup> T. Schalk,<sup>17</sup> B. A. Schumm,<sup>17</sup> A. Seiden,<sup>17</sup> M. G. Wilson,<sup>17</sup> L. O. Winstrom,<sup>17</sup> E. Chen,<sup>18</sup> C. H. Cheng,<sup>18</sup> F. Fang,<sup>18</sup> D. G. Hitlin,<sup>18</sup> I. Narsky,<sup>18</sup> T. Piatenko,<sup>18</sup> F. C. Porter,<sup>18</sup> R. Andreassen,<sup>19</sup> G. Mancinelli,<sup>19</sup> B. T. Meadows,<sup>19</sup> K. Mishra,<sup>19</sup> M. D. Sokoloff,<sup>19</sup> F. Blanc,<sup>20</sup> P. C. Bloom,<sup>20</sup> S. Chen,<sup>20</sup> W. T. Ford,<sup>20</sup> J. F. Hirschauer,<sup>20</sup> A. Kreisel,<sup>20</sup> M. Nagel,<sup>20</sup> U. Nauenberg,<sup>20</sup> A. Olivas,<sup>20</sup> J. G. Smith,<sup>20</sup> K. A. Ulmer,<sup>20</sup> S. R. Wagner,<sup>20</sup> J. Zhang,<sup>20</sup> A. M. Gabareen,<sup>21</sup> A. Soffer,<sup>21,†</sup> W. H. Toki,<sup>21</sup> R. J. Wilson,<sup>21</sup> F. Winklmeier,<sup>21</sup> D. D. Altenburg,<sup>22</sup> E. Feltresi,<sup>22</sup> A. Hauke,<sup>22</sup> H. Jasper,<sup>22</sup> J. Merkel,<sup>22</sup> A. Petzold,<sup>22</sup> B. Spaan,<sup>22</sup> K. Wacker,<sup>22</sup> V. Klose,<sup>23</sup> M. J. Kobel,<sup>23</sup> H. M. Lacker,<sup>23</sup> W. F. Mader,<sup>23</sup> R. Nogowski,<sup>23</sup> J. Schubert,<sup>23</sup> K. R. Schubert,<sup>23</sup> R. Schwierz,<sup>23</sup> J. E. Sundermann,<sup>23</sup> A. Volk,<sup>23</sup> D. Bernard,<sup>24</sup> G. R. Bonneaud,<sup>24</sup> E. Latour,<sup>24</sup> V. Lombardo,<sup>24</sup> Ch. Thiebaux,<sup>24</sup> M. Verderi,<sup>24</sup> P. J. Clark,<sup>25</sup> W. Gradl,<sup>25</sup> F. Muheim,<sup>25</sup> S. Playfer,<sup>25</sup> A. I. Robertson,<sup>25</sup> J. E. Watson,<sup>25</sup> Y. Xie,<sup>25</sup> M. Andreotti,<sup>26</sup> D. Bettoni,<sup>26</sup> C. Bozzi,<sup>26</sup> R. Calabrese,<sup>26</sup> A. Cecchi,<sup>26</sup> G. Cibinetto,<sup>26</sup> P. Franchini,<sup>26</sup> E. Luppi,<sup>26</sup> M. Negrini,<sup>26</sup> A. Petrella,<sup>26</sup> L. Piemontese,<sup>26</sup> E. Prencipe,<sup>26</sup> V. Santoro,<sup>26</sup> F. Anulli,<sup>27</sup> R. Baldini-Feroli,<sup>27</sup> A. Calcaterra,<sup>27</sup> R. de Sangro,<sup>27</sup> G. Finocchiaro,<sup>27</sup> S. Pacetti,<sup>27</sup> P. Patteri,<sup>27</sup> I. M. Peruzzi,<sup>27,‡</sup> M. Piccolo,<sup>27</sup> M. Rama,<sup>27</sup> A. Zallo,<sup>27</sup> A. Buzzo,<sup>28</sup> R. Contri,<sup>28</sup> M. Lo Vetere,<sup>28</sup> M. M. Macri,<sup>28</sup> M. R. Monge,<sup>28</sup> S. Passaggio,<sup>28</sup> C. Patrignani,<sup>28</sup> E. Robutti,<sup>28</sup> A. Santroni,<sup>28</sup> S. Tosi,<sup>28</sup> K. S. Chaisanguanthum,<sup>29</sup> M. Morii,<sup>29</sup> J. Wu,<sup>29</sup> R. S. Dubitzky,<sup>30</sup> J. Marks,<sup>30</sup> S. Schenk,<sup>30</sup> U. Uwer,<sup>30</sup> D. J. Bard,<sup>31</sup> P. D. Dauncey,<sup>31</sup> R. L. Flack,<sup>31</sup> J. A. Nash,<sup>31</sup> W. Panduro Vazquez,<sup>31</sup> M. Tibbetts,<sup>31</sup> P. K. Behera,<sup>32</sup> X. Chai,<sup>32</sup> M. J. Charles,<sup>32</sup> U. Mallik,<sup>32</sup> V. Ziegler,<sup>32</sup> J. Cochran,<sup>33</sup> H. B. Crawley,<sup>33</sup> L. Dong,<sup>33</sup> V. Eyges,<sup>33</sup> W. T. Meyer,<sup>33</sup> S. Prell,<sup>33</sup> E. I. Rosenberg,<sup>33</sup> A. E. Rubin,<sup>33</sup> Y. Y. Gao,<sup>34</sup> A. V. Gritsan,<sup>34</sup> Z. J. Guo,<sup>34</sup> C. K. Lae,<sup>34</sup> A. G. Denig,<sup>35</sup> M. Fritsch,<sup>35</sup> G. Schott,<sup>35</sup> N. Arnaud,<sup>36</sup> J. Béquilleux,<sup>36</sup> A. D'Orazio,<sup>36</sup> M. Davier,<sup>36</sup> G. Grosdidier,<sup>36</sup> A. Höcker,<sup>36</sup> V. Lepeltier,<sup>36</sup> F. Le Diberder,<sup>36</sup> A. M. Lutz,<sup>36</sup> S. Pruvot,<sup>36</sup> S. Rodier,<sup>36</sup> P. Roudeau,<sup>36</sup> M. H. Schune,<sup>36</sup> J. Serrano,<sup>36</sup> V. Sordini,<sup>36</sup> A. Stocchi,<sup>36</sup> W. F. Wang,<sup>36</sup> G. Wormser,<sup>36</sup> D. J. Lange,<sup>37</sup> D. M. Wright,<sup>37</sup> I. Bingham,<sup>38</sup> J. P. Burke,<sup>38</sup> C. A. Chavez,<sup>38</sup> I. J. Forster,<sup>38</sup> J. R. Fry,<sup>38</sup> E. Gabathuler,<sup>38</sup> R. Gamet,<sup>38</sup> D. E. Hutchcroft,<sup>38</sup> D. J. Payne,<sup>38</sup> K. C. Schofield,<sup>38</sup> C. Touramanis,<sup>38</sup> A. J. Bevan,<sup>39</sup> K. A. George,<sup>39</sup> F. Di Lodovico,<sup>39</sup> W. Menges,<sup>39</sup> R. Sacco,<sup>39</sup> G. Cowan,<sup>40</sup> H. U. Flaecher,<sup>40</sup> D. A. Hopkins,<sup>40</sup> S. Paramesvaran,<sup>40</sup> F. Salvatore,<sup>40</sup> A. C. Wren,<sup>40</sup> D. N. Brown,<sup>41</sup> C. L. Davis,<sup>41</sup> J. Allison,<sup>42</sup> N. R. Barlow,<sup>42</sup> R. J. Barlow,<sup>42</sup> Y. M. Chia,<sup>42</sup> C. L. Edgar,<sup>42</sup> G. D. Lafferty,<sup>42</sup> T. J. West,<sup>42</sup> J. I. Yi,<sup>42</sup> J. Anderson,<sup>43</sup> C. Chen,<sup>43</sup> A. Jawahery,<sup>43</sup> D. A. Roberts,<sup>43</sup> G. Simi,<sup>43</sup> J. M. Tuggle,<sup>43</sup> G. Blaylock,<sup>44</sup> C. Dallapiccola,<sup>44</sup> S. S. Hertzbach,<sup>44</sup> X. Li,<sup>44</sup> T. B. Moore,<sup>44</sup> E. Salvati,<sup>44</sup> S. Saremi,<sup>44</sup> R. Cowan,<sup>45</sup> D. Dujmic,<sup>45</sup> P. H. Fisher,<sup>45</sup> K. Koeneke,<sup>45</sup> G. Sciolla,<sup>45</sup> S. J. Sekula,<sup>45</sup> M. Spitznagel,<sup>45</sup> F. Taylor,<sup>45</sup> R. K. Yamamoto,<sup>45</sup> M. Zhao,<sup>45</sup> Y. Zheng,<sup>45</sup> S. E. McLaughlin,<sup>46,\*</sup> P. M. Patel,<sup>46</sup> S. H. Robertson,<sup>46</sup> A. Lazzaro,<sup>47</sup> F. Palombo,<sup>47</sup> J. M. Bauer,<sup>48</sup> L. Cremaldi,<sup>48</sup> V. Eschenburg,<sup>48</sup> R. Godang,<sup>48</sup> R. Kroeger,<sup>48</sup> D. A. Sanders,<sup>48</sup> D. J. Summers,<sup>48</sup> H. W. Zhao,<sup>48</sup> S. Brunet,<sup>49</sup> D. Côté,<sup>49</sup> M. Simard,<sup>49</sup> P. Taras,<sup>49</sup> F. B. Viaud,<sup>49</sup> H. Nicholson,<sup>50</sup> G. De Nardo,<sup>51</sup> F. Fabozzi,<sup>51,§</sup> L. Lista,<sup>51</sup> D. Monorchio,<sup>51</sup> C. Sciacca,<sup>51</sup> M. A. Baak,<sup>52</sup> G. Raven,<sup>52</sup> H. L. Snoek,<sup>52</sup> C. P. Jessop,<sup>53</sup> K. J. Knoepfel,<sup>53</sup> J. M. LoSecco,<sup>53</sup> G. Benelli,<sup>54</sup> L. A. Corwin,<sup>54</sup> K. Honscheid,<sup>54</sup> H. Kagan,<sup>54</sup> R. Kass,<sup>54</sup> J. P. Morris,<sup>54</sup> A. M. Rahimi,<sup>54</sup> J. J. Regensburger,<sup>54</sup> Q. K. Wong,<sup>54</sup> N. L. Blount,<sup>55</sup> J. Brau,<sup>55</sup> R. Frey,<sup>55</sup> O. Igonkina,<sup>55</sup> J. A. Kolb,<sup>55</sup> M. Lu,<sup>55</sup> R. Rahmat,<sup>55</sup> N. B. Sinev,<sup>55</sup> D. Strom,<sup>55</sup> J. Strube,<sup>55</sup> E. Torrence,<sup>55</sup> N. Gagliardi,<sup>56</sup> A. Gaz,<sup>56</sup> M. Margoni,<sup>56</sup> M. Morandin,<sup>56</sup> A. Pompili,<sup>56</sup> M. Posocco,<sup>56</sup> M. Rotondo,<sup>56</sup> F. Simonetto,<sup>56</sup> R. Stroili,<sup>56</sup> C. Voci,<sup>56</sup> E. Ben-Haim,<sup>57</sup> H. Briand,<sup>57</sup> G. Calderini,<sup>57</sup> J. Chauveau,<sup>57</sup> P. David,<sup>57</sup> L. Del Buono,<sup>57</sup> Ch. de la Vaissière,<sup>57</sup> O. Hamon,<sup>57</sup> Ph. Leruste,<sup>57</sup> J. Malclès,<sup>57</sup> J. Ocariz,<sup>57</sup> A. Perez,<sup>57</sup> J. Prendki,<sup>57</sup> L. Gladney,<sup>58</sup> M. Biasini,<sup>59</sup> R. Covarelli,<sup>59</sup>

E. Manoni,<sup>59</sup> C. Angelini,<sup>60</sup> G. Batignani,<sup>60</sup> S. Bettarini,<sup>60</sup> M. Carpinelli,<sup>60</sup> R. Cenci,<sup>60</sup> A. Cervelli,<sup>60</sup> F. Forti,<sup>60</sup> M. A. Giorgi,<sup>60</sup> A. Lusiani,<sup>60</sup> G. Marchiori,<sup>60</sup> M. A. Mazur,<sup>60</sup> M. Morganti,<sup>60</sup> N. Neri,<sup>60</sup> E. Paoloni,<sup>60</sup> G. Rizzo,<sup>60</sup> J. J. Walsh,<sup>60</sup> M. Haire,<sup>61</sup> J. Biesiada,<sup>62</sup> P. Elmer,<sup>62</sup> Y. P. Lau,<sup>62</sup> C. Lu,<sup>62</sup> J. Olsen,<sup>62</sup> A. J. S. Smith,<sup>62</sup> A. V. Telnov,<sup>62</sup> E. Baracchini,<sup>63</sup> F. Bellini,<sup>63</sup> G. Cavoto,<sup>63</sup> D. del Re,<sup>63</sup> E. Di Marco,<sup>63</sup> R. Faccini,<sup>63</sup> F. Ferrarotto,<sup>63</sup> F. Ferroni,<sup>63</sup> M. Gaspero,<sup>63</sup> P. D. Jackson,<sup>63</sup> L. Li Gioi,<sup>63</sup> M. A. Mazzoni,<sup>63</sup> S. Morganti,<sup>63</sup> G. Piredda,<sup>63</sup> F. Polci,<sup>63</sup> F. Renga,<sup>63</sup> C. Voena,<sup>63</sup> M. Ebert,<sup>64</sup> T. Hartmann,<sup>64</sup> H. Schröder,<sup>64</sup> R. Waldi,<sup>64</sup> T. Adye,<sup>65</sup> G. Castelli,<sup>65</sup> B. Franek,<sup>65</sup> E. O. Olaiya,<sup>65</sup> S. Ricciardi,<sup>65</sup> W. Roethel,<sup>65</sup> F. F. Wilson,<sup>65</sup> S. Emery,<sup>66</sup> M. Escalier,<sup>66</sup> A. Gaidot,<sup>66</sup> S. F. Ganzhur,<sup>66</sup> G. Hamel de Monchenault,<sup>66</sup> W. Kozanecki,<sup>66</sup> G. Vasseur,<sup>66</sup> Ch. Yèche,<sup>66</sup> M. Zito,<sup>66</sup> X. R. Chen,<sup>67</sup> H. Liu,<sup>67</sup> W. Park,<sup>67</sup> M. V. Purohit,<sup>67</sup> J. R. Wilson,<sup>67</sup> M. T. Allen,<sup>68</sup> D. Aston,<sup>68</sup> R. Bartoldus,<sup>68</sup> P. Bechtle,<sup>68</sup> N. Berger,<sup>68</sup> R. Claus,<sup>68</sup> J. P. Coleman,<sup>68</sup> M. R. Convery,<sup>68</sup> J. C. Dingfelder,<sup>68</sup> J. Dorfan,<sup>68</sup> G. P. Dubois-Felsmann,<sup>68</sup> W. Dunwoodie,<sup>68</sup> R. C. Field,<sup>68</sup> T. Glanzman,<sup>68</sup> S. J. Gowdy,<sup>68</sup> M. T. Graham,<sup>68</sup> P. Grenier,<sup>68</sup> C. Hast,<sup>68</sup> T. Hryn'ova,<sup>68</sup> W. R. Innes,<sup>68</sup> J. Kaminski,<sup>68</sup> M. H. Kelsey,<sup>68</sup> H. Kim,<sup>68</sup> P. Kim,<sup>68</sup> M. L. Kocian,<sup>68</sup> D. W. G. S. Leith,<sup>68</sup> S. Li,<sup>68</sup> S. Luitz,<sup>68</sup> V. Luth,<sup>68</sup> H. L. Lynch,<sup>68</sup> D. B. MacFarlane,<sup>68</sup> H. Marsiske,<sup>68</sup> R. Messner,<sup>68</sup> D. R. Muller,<sup>68</sup> C. P. O'Grady,<sup>68</sup> I. Ofte,<sup>68</sup> A. Perazzo,<sup>68</sup> M. Perl,<sup>68</sup> T. Pulliam,<sup>68</sup> B. N. Ratcliff,<sup>68</sup> A. Roodman,<sup>68</sup> A. A. Salnikov,<sup>68</sup> R. H. Schindler,<sup>68</sup> J. Schwiening,<sup>68</sup> A. Snyder,<sup>68</sup> J. Stelzer,<sup>68</sup> D. Su,<sup>68</sup> M. K. Sullivan,<sup>68</sup> K. Suzuki,<sup>68</sup> S. K. Swain,<sup>68</sup> J. M. Thompson,<sup>68</sup> J. Va'vra,<sup>68</sup> N. van Bakel,<sup>68</sup> A. P. Wagner,<sup>68</sup> M. Weaver,<sup>68</sup> W. J. Wisniewski,<sup>68</sup> M. Wittgen,<sup>68</sup> D. H. Wright,<sup>68</sup> A. K. Yarritu,<sup>68</sup> K. Yi,<sup>68</sup> C. C. Young,<sup>68</sup> P. R. Burchat,<sup>69</sup> A. J. Edwards,<sup>69</sup> S. A. Majewski,<sup>69</sup> B. A. Petersen,<sup>69</sup> L. Wilden,<sup>69</sup> S. Ahmed,<sup>70</sup> M. S. Alam,<sup>70</sup> R. Bula,<sup>70</sup> J. A. Ernst,<sup>70</sup> V. Jain,<sup>70</sup> B. Pan,<sup>70</sup> M. A. Saeed,<sup>70</sup> F. R. Wappler,<sup>70</sup> S. B. Zain,<sup>70</sup> M. Krishnamurthy,<sup>71</sup> S. M. Spanier,<sup>71</sup> R. Eckmann,<sup>72</sup> J. L. Ritchie,<sup>72</sup> A. M. Ruland,<sup>72</sup> C. J. Schilling,<sup>72</sup> R. F. Schwitters,<sup>72</sup> J. M. Izen,<sup>73</sup> X. C. Lou,<sup>73</sup> S. Ye,<sup>73</sup> F. Bianchi,<sup>74</sup> F. Gallo,<sup>74</sup> D. Gamba,<sup>74</sup> M. Pelliccioni,<sup>74</sup> M. Bomben,<sup>75</sup> L. Bosisio,<sup>75</sup> C. Cartaro,<sup>75</sup> F. Cossutti,<sup>75</sup> G. Della Ricca,<sup>75</sup> L. Lanceri,<sup>75</sup> L. Vitale,<sup>75</sup> V. Azzolini,<sup>76</sup> N. Lopez-March,<sup>76</sup> F. Martinez-Vidal,<sup>76</sup> D. A. Milanes,<sup>76</sup> A. Oyanguren,<sup>76</sup> J. Albert,<sup>77</sup> Sw. Banerjee,<sup>77</sup> B. Bhuyan,<sup>77</sup> K. Hamano,<sup>77</sup> R. Kowalewski,<sup>77</sup> I. M. Nugent,<sup>77</sup> J. M. Roney,<sup>77</sup> R. J. Sobie,<sup>77</sup> P. F. Harrison,<sup>78</sup> J. Ilic,<sup>78</sup> T. E. Latham,<sup>78</sup> G. B. Mohanty,<sup>78</sup> H. R. Band,<sup>79</sup> X. Chen,<sup>79</sup> S. Dasu,<sup>79</sup> K. T. Flood,<sup>79</sup> J. J. Hollar,<sup>79</sup> P. E. Kutter,<sup>79</sup> Y. Pan,<sup>79</sup> M. Pierini,<sup>79</sup> R. Prepost,<sup>79</sup> S. L. Wu,<sup>79</sup> and H. Neal<sup>80</sup>

(BABAR Collaboration)

<sup>1</sup>Laboratoire de Physique des Particules, IN2P3/CNRS et Université de Savoie, F-74941 Annecy-Le-Vieux, France

<sup>2</sup>Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat de Física, Departament ECM, E-08028 Barcelona, Spain

<sup>3</sup>Università di Bari, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-70126 Bari, Italy

<sup>4</sup>University of Bergen, Institute of Physics, N-5007 Bergen, Norway

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and University of California, Berkeley, California 94720, USA

<sup>6</sup>University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom

<sup>7</sup>Ruhr Universität Bochum, Institut für Experimentalphysik I, D-44780 Bochum, Germany

<sup>8</sup>University of Bristol, Bristol BS8 1TL, United Kingdom

<sup>9</sup>University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1Z1

<sup>10</sup>Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3PH, United Kingdom

<sup>11</sup>Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics, Novosibirsk 630090, Russia

<sup>12</sup>University of California at Irvine, Irvine, California 92697, USA

<sup>13</sup>University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 90024, USA

<sup>14</sup>University of California at Riverside, Riverside, California 92521, USA

<sup>15</sup>University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, California 92093, USA

<sup>16</sup>University of California at Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California 93106, USA

<sup>17</sup>University of California at Santa Cruz, Institute for Particle Physics, Santa Cruz, California 95064, USA

<sup>18</sup>California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91125, USA

<sup>19</sup>University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 45221, USA

<sup>20</sup>University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309, USA

<sup>21</sup>Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523, USA

<sup>22</sup>Universität Dortmund, Institut für Physik, D-44221 Dortmund, Germany

<sup>23</sup>Technische Universität Dresden, Institut für Kern- und Teilchenphysik, D-01062 Dresden, Germany

<sup>24</sup>Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, CNRS/IN2P3, Ecole Polytechnique, F-91128 Palaiseau, France

<sup>25</sup>University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH9 3JZ, United Kingdom

<sup>26</sup>Università di Ferrara, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-44100 Ferrara, Italy

<sup>27</sup>Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati dell'INFN, I-00044 Frascati, Italy

<sup>28</sup>Università di Genova, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-16146 Genova, Italy

<sup>29</sup>Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, USA

- <sup>30</sup>Universität Heidelberg, Physikalisches Institut, Philosophenweg 12, D-69120 Heidelberg, Germany
- <sup>31</sup>Imperial College London, London, SW7 2AZ, United Kingdom
- <sup>32</sup>University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, USA
- <sup>33</sup>Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011-3160, USA
- <sup>34</sup>Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland 21218, USA
- <sup>35</sup>Universität Karlsruhe, Institut für Experimentelle Kernphysik, D-76021 Karlsruhe, Germany
- <sup>36</sup>Laboratoire de l'Accélérateur Linéaire, IN2P3/CNRS et Université Paris-Sud 11, Centre Scientifique d'Orsay, B. P. 34, F-91898 ORSAY Cedex, France
- <sup>37</sup>Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, California 94550, USA
- <sup>38</sup>University of Liverpool, Liverpool L69 7ZE, United Kingdom
- <sup>39</sup>Queen Mary, University of London, E1 4NS, United Kingdom
- <sup>40</sup>University of London, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX, United Kingdom
- <sup>41</sup>University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky 40292, USA
- <sup>42</sup>University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom
- <sup>43</sup>University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742, USA
- <sup>44</sup>University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003, USA
- <sup>45</sup>Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Laboratory for Nuclear Science, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA
- <sup>46</sup>McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada H3A 2T8
- <sup>47</sup>Università di Milano, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-20133 Milano, Italy
- <sup>48</sup>University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi 38677, USA
- <sup>49</sup>Université de Montréal, Physique des Particules, Montréal, Québec, Canada H3C 3J7
- <sup>50</sup>Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts 01075, USA
- <sup>51</sup>Università di Napoli Federico II, Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche and INFN, I-80126, Napoli, Italy
- <sup>52</sup>NIKHEF, National Institute for Nuclear Physics and High Energy Physics, NL-1009 DB Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- <sup>53</sup>University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, USA
- <sup>54</sup>Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA
- <sup>55</sup>University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403, USA
- <sup>56</sup>Università di Padova, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-35131 Padova, Italy
- <sup>57</sup>Laboratoire de Physique Nucléaire et de Hautes Energies, IN2P3/CNRS, Université Pierre et Marie Curie-Paris6, Université Denis Diderot-Paris7, F-75252 Paris, France
- <sup>58</sup>University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104, USA
- <sup>59</sup>Università di Perugia, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-06100 Perugia, Italy
- <sup>60</sup>Università di Pisa, Dipartimento di Fisica, Scuola Normale Superiore and INFN, I-56127 Pisa, Italy
- <sup>61</sup>Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas 77446, USA
- <sup>62</sup>Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08544, USA
- <sup>63</sup>Università di Roma La Sapienza, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-00185 Roma, Italy
- <sup>64</sup>Universität Rostock, D-18051 Rostock, Germany
- <sup>65</sup>Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Chilton, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 0QX, United Kingdom
- <sup>66</sup>DSM/Dapnia, CEA/Saclay, F-91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France
- <sup>67</sup>University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208, USA
- <sup>68</sup>Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, Stanford, California 94309, USA
- <sup>69</sup>Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305-4060, USA
- <sup>70</sup>State University of New York, Albany, New York 12222, USA
- <sup>71</sup>University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996, USA
- <sup>72</sup>University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712, USA
- <sup>73</sup>University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas 75083, USA
- <sup>74</sup>Università di Torino, Dipartimento di Fisica Sperimentale and INFN, I-10125 Torino, Italy
- <sup>75</sup>Università di Trieste, Dipartimento di Fisica and INFN, I-34127 Trieste, Italy
- <sup>76</sup>IFIC, Universitat de Valencia-CSIC, E-46071 Valencia, Spain
- <sup>77</sup>University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V8W 3P6
- <sup>78</sup>Department of Physics, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, United Kingdom
- <sup>79</sup>University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA
- <sup>80</sup>Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06511, USA

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Using  $383 \times 10^6 B\bar{B}$  pairs from the *BABAR* data sample, we report results for branching fractions of six charged *B*-meson decay modes, where a charged kaon recoils against a charmless resonance decaying to  $K\bar{K}^*$  or  $\eta\pi\pi$  final states with mass in the range  $(1.2\text{--}1.8) \text{ GeV}/c^2$ . We observe a significant enhancement at the low  $K\bar{K}^*$  invariant mass which is interpreted as  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1475)K^+$ , find evidence for the decay  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1295)K^+$ , and place upper limits on the decays  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1405)K^+$ ,  $B^+ \rightarrow f_1(1285)K^+$ ,  $B^+ \rightarrow f_1(1420)K^+$ , and  $B^+ \rightarrow \phi(1680)K^+$ .

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Charmless hadronic  $B$ -meson decays have been of particular interest due to their sensitivity to weak interaction dynamics. The first observed gluonic-penguin-dominated decays, such as  $B \rightarrow \eta'K$  and  $B \rightarrow \pi K$  [1], allowed the study of  $CP$  violation in these decays with potential sensitivity to new physics [2,3]. The relatively large  $B \rightarrow \eta'K$  decay rate was also a topic of debate. However, little is known about the  $B$ -meson decays to excited states of the  $\eta$  and  $\eta'$  mesons. There are three candidates for the first excited states  $\eta(1295)$ ,  $\eta(1405)$ , and  $\eta(1475)$  [4], and there is a possibility that they might include a gluonium admixture [5]. This part of the pseudoscalar meson spectrum remains uncertain after a few decades of studies [5–11]. A search for  $B$ -meson decays to these pseudoscalar states is the focus of this Letter.

The  $\eta$  and  $\eta'$  candidates and their excited counterparts, which we call generically  $\eta_X$  in this Letter, have the quantum numbers  $J^P = 0^-$  and decay strongly to at least three pseudoscalar mesons. Thus we look for the  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}\pi$  and  $\eta\pi\pi$  final states. In the former case, the resonant structure  $K\bar{K}^* + \bar{K}K^*$  is of particular interest, and we refer to it as  $K\bar{K}^*$ . Previously, the  $K^*K^+K^-$  final state has been studied by *BABAR* inclusively [12]. The  $J^P = 1^+$  mesons  $f_1(1285)$  and  $f_1(1420)$  and  $J^P = 1^-$  meson  $\phi(1680)$  also appear in the mass range (1.2–1.8) GeV/ $c^2$  in these final states. These resonances are considered in our search for the decays  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+$  and referred to by the generic nomenclature  $\eta_X$  as well. Hermitian conjugation is implied throughout this Letter unless stated otherwise.

The  $B \rightarrow \eta_X K$  decay mechanism is expected to be dominated by the  $b \rightarrow s$  gluonic-loop penguin diagram, similar to the  $B \rightarrow \eta'K$  decay. The expected branching fractions differ significantly depending on the  $\eta_X$  state [4], following a pattern that early naive factorization models were unable to predict [13]. The first attempt at unraveling the pattern in the branching fractions of  $B$ -meson decays with  $\eta$  and  $\eta'$  [14] suggested including the interference within the quark flavor octet among other possible scenarios, but the predictions did not match the experimental data. More recent calculations find a larger predicted rate for  $B \rightarrow \eta'K$ , in agreement with data, with inclusion of higher-order corrections [15] or “charming-penguin” contributions [16]; large theoretical uncertainties persist, partly due to insufficient experimental data. An admixture of a bound two-gluon state, gluonium, in  $\eta_X$  could also explain the enhancement of the branching fractions.

Although the  $\eta(1295)$ ,  $\eta(1405)$ , and  $\eta(1475)$  states are considered well-established [4], their nature is still unknown. Partial wave analyses of the  $K\bar{K}\pi$  and  $\eta\pi\pi$  spectra from past experiments, such as studies in Refs. [7–10], conclude that the meson spectrum in the (1.2–1.8) GeV/ $c^2$  range is described by a linear combination of the resonant states and a nonresonant phase-space contribution. The

analyses in Refs. [7,8] found that mass spectrum description without interference between the resonant and non-resonant contributions is preferred. Therefore, in our analysis we adopt the model of three spin-zero resonances  $\eta(1295)$ ,  $\eta(1405)$ , and  $\eta(1475)$ , three spin-one resonances  $f_1(1285)$ ,  $f_1(1420)$ , and  $\phi(1680)$ , and a phase-space non-resonant contribution without interference with the above states. Only four resonances are considered in each final state,  $K\bar{K}^*$  or  $\eta\pi\pi$ , according to their dominant decay modes as discussed below.

We use a sample of  $(383 \pm 4) \times 10^6$   $Y(4S) \rightarrow B\bar{B}$  events collected with the *BABAR* detector [17] at the PEP-II  $e^+e^-$  asymmetric-energy storage rings with the  $e^+e^-$  center-of-mass energy  $\sqrt{s} = 10.58$  GeV. Momenta of charged particles are measured in a tracking system consisting of a silicon vertex tracker with five double-sided layers and a 40-layer drift chamber, both within the 1.5-T magnetic field of a solenoid. Identification of charged particles is provided by measurements of the energy loss in the tracking devices and by a ring-imaging Cherenkov detector. Photons are detected by a CsI(Tl) electromagnetic calorimeter.

We search for  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+$  where  $\eta_X$  decays to  $K\bar{K}^*$  and  $\eta\pi^+\pi^-$ . We reconstruct  $K\bar{K}^* \rightarrow K^0 K^\pm \pi^\mp$ ,  $K^0 \rightarrow K_S^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^-$ , and  $\eta \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$ . Isospin symmetry implies that the final states  $K^0 K^- \pi^+ + \bar{K}^0 K^+ \pi^-$  and  $\eta\pi^+\pi^-$  constitute two-thirds of  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*$  and  $\eta_X \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi$ , respectively.

We identify  $B$ -meson candidates using two kinematic variables:  $m_{ES} = \sqrt{s/4 - \mathbf{p}_B^2}$  and  $\Delta E = \sqrt{s}/2 - E_B$ , where  $(E_B, \mathbf{p}_B)$  is the four-momentum of the  $B$  candidate in the  $e^+e^-$  center-of-mass frame. We require  $m_{ES} > 5.25$  GeV/ $c^2$  and  $|\Delta E| < 0.1$  GeV. The requirements on the invariant masses are  $1.35 < m_{K\bar{K}^*} < 1.8$  GeV/ $c^2$ ,  $1.2 < m_{\eta\pi\pi} < 1.5$  GeV/ $c^2$ ,  $|m_{\pi\pi} - m_{K^0}| < 12$  MeV/ $c^2$ , and  $510 < m_{\gamma\gamma} < 570$  MeV/ $c^2$ . The  $\eta_X$  invariant mass range is chosen to include the broad spectrum of states without extending it above the charm background production threshold.

We require the photon energies be at least 100 MeV. For the  $K_S^0$  candidates, we require the cosine of the angle between the flight direction from the interaction point and the momentum direction to be greater than 0.995 and the measured proper decay time to be greater than 5 times its uncertainty. In the  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^* + \bar{K}K^* \rightarrow K\bar{K}\pi$  decay channel, we require the  $\bar{K}\pi$  or  $K\pi$  invariant mass to satisfy  $0.85 < m_{K\pi} < 0.95$  GeV/ $c^2$  for either  $K^\pm \pi^\mp$  or  $K^0 \pi^\mp$  combinations.

We use the angle  $\theta_T$  between the  $B$ -candidate thrust axis and that of the rest of the event and a Fisher discriminant  $\mathcal{F}_L$  to reject the dominant  $e^+e^- \rightarrow$  quark-antiquark back-

ground [18]. Both variables are calculated in the  $e^+e^-$  center-of-mass frame. The discriminant combines the polar angles of the  $B$ -candidate momentum vector and its thrust axis with respect to the beam axis and two moments of the energy flow around the  $B$ -candidate thrust axis [18].

We suppress the background from  $B$  decays into states with  $D$  or  $c\bar{c}$  mesons by applying vetoes on the invariant masses of their decay products. The remaining background (less than 10%) comes from random combinations of tracks from  $B$  decays and from  $B^+ \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*K^+$ . When more than one candidate is reconstructed, we select the one with the lowest combined  $\chi^2$  of the charged-track vertex fit and of the invariant mass of the  $K_S^0$  or  $\eta$  candidate relative to the PDG values [4].

We define the helicity angle  $\theta_{\mathcal{H}}$  as the angle between the direction of the  $B$  meson and the normal vector to the  $\eta_X$  three-body decay plane in the  $\eta_X$  rest frame. The ideal distribution is uniform,  $\mathcal{H}^2$ , or  $(1 - \mathcal{H}^2)$  for  $\eta_X$  with  $J^P = 0^-, 1^-,$  or  $1^+$ , respectively, where  $\mathcal{H} = \cos\theta_{\mathcal{H}}$ . The observed angular distribution can be parametrized as a product of the ideal angular distribution for a given spin and parity multiplied by an empirical acceptance function parametrized as a polynomial  $P(|\mathcal{H}|)$ .

We use an unbinned, extended maximum-likelihood fit to extract the event yields  $n_j$  and the parameters  $\xi$  of the probability density functions (PDFs)  $\mathcal{P}_j$ . The index  $j$  represents six event categories used in our data model: the  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+$  signal (four categories in each of the two  $\eta_X$  decay channels as shown in Table I), combinatorial background (mostly  $e^+e^- \rightarrow q\bar{q}$  production with a few percent admixture of misreconstructed  $B$ -meson decays),

and a possible background from  $B \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*K$  (in the  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*$  channel) or other  $B$  backgrounds (in the  $\eta_X \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi$  channel). The likelihood  $\mathcal{L}_i$  for each candidate  $i$  is defined as  $\mathcal{L}_i = \sum_j n_j \mathcal{P}_j(\mathbf{x}_i, \xi)$ , where the PDF is formed from the observables  $\mathbf{x} = \{m_{ES}, \Delta E, \mathcal{F}_L, \mathcal{H}, m\}$ . Here  $m$  is the invariant mass of the  $\eta_X$  candidate.

We use a relativistic spin- $J$  Breit-Wigner amplitude parametrization for the invariant mass of an  $\eta_X$  resonance with the nominal mass and width parameters quoted in Table I. We model the decay kinematics as  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^* \rightarrow K\bar{K}\pi$  and  $\eta_X \rightarrow a_0(980)\pi \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi$ . For the  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*$  mode, the  $\eta_X$  invariant mass parametrization is corrected for phase space of the  $B^+ \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*K^+$  decay and averaged over the  $\bar{K}^* \rightarrow \bar{K}\pi$  invariant mass values. We ignore the interference between the overlapping resonances because it averages to zero for resonances with different quantum numbers or because these resonances have different final states, such as  $\eta(1405)$  and  $\eta(1475)$ . The former decays mainly to  $a_0(980)\pi$  (or direct  $K\bar{K}\pi$ ) and the latter mainly to  $K\bar{K}^*$  [4]. We also ignore the interference between the resonant and nonresonant decays based on indications from previous studies of  $\eta_X$  decays [7,8] and due to potentially different three-body structure. This interference effect would only increase the significance estimate because the hypothesis of zero yield is not affected and the likelihood of the nominal fit could only improve. The significance is defined as the square root of the change in  $2\ln\mathcal{L}$  when the yield is constrained to zero in the likelihood  $\mathcal{L}$ .

The signal PDF for a given candidate  $i$  is the product of the PDFs for each of the discriminating variables. The

TABLE I. Summary of results for the  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+$  process studied with six  $B$ -decay modes and eight decay channels with the signal resonance and nonresonant model discussed in text, where  $\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^* \rightarrow K_S^0 K^\pm \pi^\mp$  in the upper part and  $\eta_X \rightarrow \eta\pi^+ \pi^-$  in the lower part. The mass  $m_0$  and width  $\Gamma$  of six  $\eta_X$  states are quoted [4] with errors in parentheses. The number of signal events  $n_{\text{sig}}$  with the significance of the observed signal in parentheses, the product of the branching fractions  $\mathcal{B}$  and the corresponding daughter branching fractions, the  $B^+ \rightarrow f_1(1285)K^+$  branching fraction, the corresponding 90% C.L. upper limits, and selection efficiencies  $\epsilon$  obtained from MC simulation are shown. The systematic uncertainties are quoted last.

$\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*$	$\eta(1475)$	$\phi(1680)$	$\eta(1405)$	$f_1(1420)$
$m_0/\Gamma$ [4], MeV	1476(4)/87(9)	1680(20)/150(50)	1409.8(2.5)/51.1(3.4)	1426.3(0.9)/54.9(2.6)
$n_{\text{sig}}$	$155_{-19}^{+21+11}(7.5\sigma)$	$17_{-9}^{+6} \pm 7$	$-12_{-5}^{+8} \pm 1$	$36_{-14}^{+13} \pm 7$
90% C.L.	<192	<39	<12	<56
$\mathcal{B}(B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+) \mathcal{B}(\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*)$	$(13.8_{-1.7}^{+1.8+1.0} \pm 0.6)10^{-6}$	$(1.5_{-0.8}^{+0.5+0.7} \pm 0.6)10^{-6}$	$(-1.2_{-0.5}^{+0.9} \pm 0.1)10^{-6}$	$(2.7_{-1.0}^{+0.9} \pm 0.5)10^{-6}$
90% C.L.	< $17 \times 10^{-6}$	< $3.4 \times 10^{-6}$	< $1.2 \times 10^{-6}$	< $4.1 \times 10^{-6}$
$\epsilon$ (%)	$8.8 \pm 0.1$	$9.0 \pm 0.2$	$8.4 \pm 0.3$	$10.7 \pm 0.3$
$\eta_X \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi$	$\eta(1295)$	$f_1(1285)$	$\eta(1405)$	$f_1(1420)$
$m_0/\Gamma$ [4], MeV	1294(4)/55(5)	1281.8(0.6)/24.2(1.1)		
$n_{\text{sig}}$	$131_{-33}^{+35} \pm 10(3.5\sigma)$	$-30_{-19}^{+21} \pm 14$	$-14_{-33}^{+36} \pm 6$	$49_{-34}^{+35} \pm 11$
90% C.L.	<179	<30	<54	<99
$\mathcal{B}(B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+) \mathcal{B}(\eta_X \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi)$	$(2.9_{-0.7}^{+0.8} \pm 0.2)10^{-6}$	$(-0.8_{-0.5}^{+0.6} \pm 0.4)10^{-6}$	$(-0.3_{-0.8}^{+0.9} \pm 0.1)10^{-6}$	$(1.4 \pm 1.0 \pm 0.3)10^{-6}$
90% C.L.	< $4.0 \times 10^{-6}$	< $0.8 \times 10^{-6}$	< $1.3 \times 10^{-6}$	< $2.9 \times 10^{-6}$
$\mathcal{B}(B \rightarrow f_1(1285)K^+)$	...	$(-1.5_{-1.0}^{+1.1} \pm 1.2)10^{-6}$	...	...
90% C.L.	...	< $2.0 \times 10^{-6}$	...	...
$\epsilon$ (%)	$17.6 \pm 0.3$	$14.1 \pm 0.9$	$16.5 \pm 1.2$	$13.5 \pm 0.6$

combinatorial background PDF is the product of the PDFs for independent variables. The signal and background PDFs are illustrated in Fig. 1. We use a sum of Gaussian functions for the parametrization of the signal PDFs for  $\Delta E$ ,  $m_{ES}$ , and  $\mathcal{F}_L$ . For the combinatorial background, we use polynomials, except for  $m_{ES}$  and  $\mathcal{F}_L$  distributions, which are parametrized by an empirical phase-space function and by Gaussian functions, respectively. The nonresonant  $B \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*K$  background is parametrized the same as the signal, except for the quantity  $m$ , which is described by a phase-space function.

The PDF parameters ( $\zeta$ ) of the combinatorial background are left free to vary in the fit, except for the parameters that describe  $\mathcal{F}_L$  and the  $m_{ES}$  end point, which are fixed to the values extracted from the data sideband region ( $m_{ES} < 5.27 \text{ GeV}/c^2$  or  $|\Delta E| > 0.07 \text{ GeV}$ ). The PDF parameters for other event categories are taken from Monte Carlo (MC) simulation [19] and adjusted with  $B \rightarrow \bar{D}\pi$  calibration data samples. We allow the yields to become negative as long as the total likelihood function remains positive in the allowed ranges of the observables. We study the goodness of fit and validate the fit procedure using MC simulation and generated samples.

In Table I, we present the results of the fit. We observe a large charmless contribution in the  $B^+ \rightarrow (K\bar{K}^*)K^+$  decay with a significant enhancement at the low  $K\bar{K}^*$  invariant mass, which is interpreted as  $\eta(1475) \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*$  from the decay  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1475)K^+$ . We also see evidence for a non-zero  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1295)K^+$  yield in the  $\eta(1295) \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi$  channel. The significances are more than 7.5 and 3.5 standard deviations, respectively, including systematic uncertainties. The significance of the  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1295)K^+$  yield is obtained in the fit when all yields are restricted to be positive, thus reducing the significance from the nominal fit. The significance is calculated within the model of resonant and nonresonant signal contributions discussed above and in earlier work [4,7,8]. We quote 90% confidence level (C.L.) upper limits, taken to be the values below which lies 90% of the total of the likelihood integral in the positive branching fraction or yield region.

We repeat the fit by varying the fixed parameters in  $\zeta$  within their uncertainties to obtain the associated systematic uncertainties. The biases from the presence of fake combinations or other imperfections in the signal PDF model are estimated with MC simulation. Additional systematic uncertainties originate from other potential  $B$  backgrounds, which we estimate can contribute at most a few events to the signal component. As a cross-check, we repeat the fit with the particle identification on the recoil kaon reversed in order to enhance the  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi K^+$  topology by more than a factor of 10 compared to the nominal reconstruction and find no evidence for such a decay. The systematic uncertainties in selection efficiencies are dominated by those in particle identification, track finding, and  $K_S^0$  and  $\eta$  selection. Other systematic effects arise from

event-selection criteria and the estimation of the number of  $B$  mesons.

The states  $\eta(1475)$ ,  $\phi(1680)$ , and  $f_1(1420)$  are expected to decay into the  $K\bar{K}\pi$  final state through  $K\bar{K}^*$  [4]. We cross-check the  $K\bar{K}^*$  dominance by removing the  $\bar{K}\pi$  mass requirement and find consistent results. With the present data set, we are unable to resolve intermediate states in the  $\eta\pi\pi$  modes, such as  $\rho^0(770)$  and  $a_0^\pm(980)$  resonances.

In the projection plots in Fig. 1, for illustration purposes, the signal fraction is enhanced with a requirement on the signal-to-background probability ratio, calculated with the plotted variable excluded. The  $m$  projection plot in Fig. 1(e) implies a possible difference of the signal resonance parameters from the assumed values. We repeat the fit with the  $\eta(1475)$  resonance parameters  $m_0$  and  $\Gamma$  unconstrained while constraining other fit parameters to the values from the nominal fit. We find the  $m_0$  and  $\Gamma$  central values to be larger but still consistent with the nominal

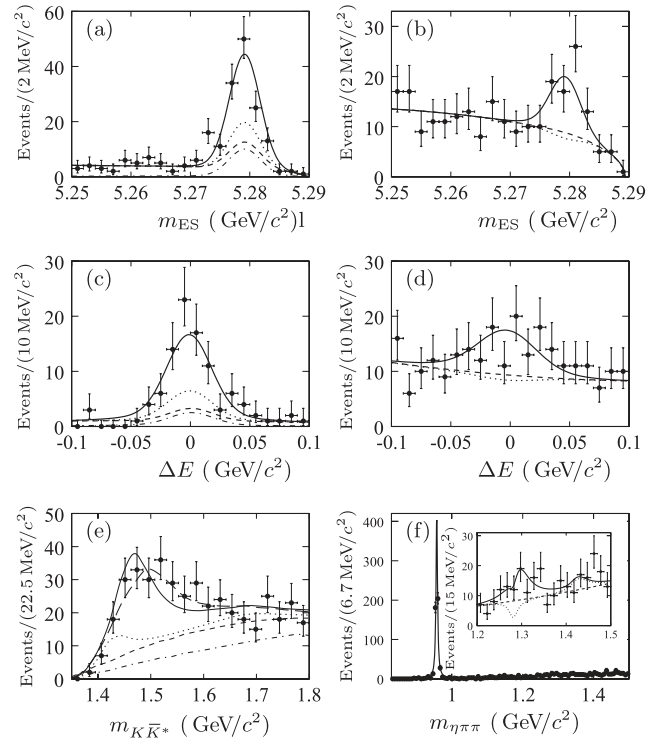


FIG. 1. Projections for  $B^+ \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*K^+$  (left column) and  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta\pi\pi K^+$  (right column) of (a),(b)  $m_{ES}$ , (c),(d)  $\Delta E$ , and (e),(f)  $m$  with a requirement applied on the signal-to-background probability ratio calculated with all variables except the one being plotted. The extended mass region in (f) includes the  $\eta'$  resonance as a cross-check. The nominal region is shown in the inset. The solid (dashed) lines show the signal-plus-background (background) PDF projections. The dotted line shows the total PDF projection excluding the  $\eta(1475)K^+$  (left) or  $\eta(1295)K^+$  (right) final states. The dashed-dotted lines indicate the non-resonant component. The long-dashed line in (e) represents the cross-check with the  $\eta(1475)$  resonance mass ( $m_0$ ) and width ( $\Gamma$ ) parameters unconstrained, both resulting in larger values.

values within statistical uncertainties ( $1482 \pm 10$  and  $108 \pm 20$  MeV, respectively). We also repeat the fit with the  $m$  range extended up to  $2.5 \text{ GeV}/c^2$  and find good extrapolation of the fit results in the full range, apart from the narrow charm production contribution just above the  $1.8 \text{ GeV}/c^2$  threshold.

In summary, we have measured product branching fractions  $\mathcal{B}(B^+ \rightarrow \eta_X K^+) \times \mathcal{B}(\eta_X \rightarrow K\bar{K}^*, \eta\pi\pi)$  for six  $B$ -decay modes that have not been studied previously, where  $\eta_X$  stands for  $\eta(1295)$ ,  $\eta(1405)$ ,  $\eta(1475)$ ,  $f_1(1285)$ ,  $f_1(1420)$ , or  $\phi(1680)$ . We observe a significant enhancement at the low  $K\bar{K}^*$  invariant mass which is interpreted as  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1475)K^+$  and find evidence for the decay  $B^+ \rightarrow \eta(1295)K^+$ . These decays could be used to either test weak dynamics in the predominant  $b \rightarrow s$  gluonic-loop penguin transition or study the  $\eta_X$  composition, including potential gluonium admixture.

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\*Deceased.

†Present address: Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, 69978, Israel.

‡Also at Università di Perugia, Dipartimento di Fisica, Perugia, Italy.

§Also at Università della Basilicata, Potenza, Italy.

||Also at Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat de Fisica, Departament ECM, E-08028 Barcelona, Spain.

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