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The challenge to modern magnetic microscopies is provide both spatial resolution in the nanometer regime, a time resolution on a ps to fs scale and elemental specificity which allows to study novel multicomponent and multifunctional magnetic nanostructures and their ultrafast spin dynamics which is of both fundamental and technological interest.

Magnetic soft X-ray microscopy combines X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (X-MCD) used as huge and element specific magnetic contrast mechanism with high spatial and temporal resolution. Fresnel zone plates used as X-ray optical elements provide a spatial resolution down to currently <15nm which approaches fundamental magnetic length scales such as the grain size and magnetic exchange lengths. As a pure photon-in/photon-out based technique the images can be recorded in external magnetic fields giving access to study magnetization reversal phenomena on the nanoscale. Circularly polarized X-rays are available at current synchrotron sources with an inherent time structure which is only limited by the lengths of the electron bunches in the storage ring.Thus fast magnetization dynamics with 70ps time resolution can be performed with a stroboscopic pump-probe scheme.

I will review the current achievements of magnetic soft X-ray microscopy with respect to lateral and temporal resolution by selected examples on magnetic multilayers and nanostructured systems where both classical Oersted fields as well as spin torque phenomena are used to manipulate the magnetisation on the nanoscale. Future perspectives of magnetic soft X-ray microscopy aiming for <10nm spatial and fs time resolution will be discussed which will allow to record single shot images of fs spin dynamics on the nanoscale.

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