Searching for Signatures of Internal Gamma-ray Absorption in High-redshift Blazars

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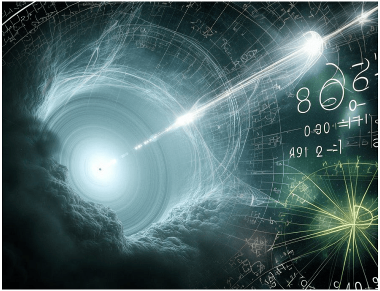

High-Energy Astrophysics in Southern Africa (HEASA) 2024 – Wits Rural Facility

Outline

1. Introduction to Blazars
   - Blazars: what can spectra tell us?
   - γ-γ opacity
2. Searching for Opacity Features in High-z Blazars
   - Source selection and data analysis
   - Opacity model
   - Optical data: target photon field
   - Modeling results
   - Implications
3. Future work and prospects
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Blazars: phenomenon and properties

Blazars – radio-loud AGN with a jet aligned with the line of sight

- non-thermal emission from radio to γ-rays
- two-bump SED
- highly variable!
  - **Flares**: flux $\nearrow$ by a factor $\sim$**10** over short time-scales minutes – weeks
  - **High states**: $t_{\rm var} \sim$ weeks – years

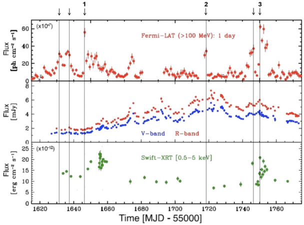


Figure: Multi-band light curves of 3C 279 variability.

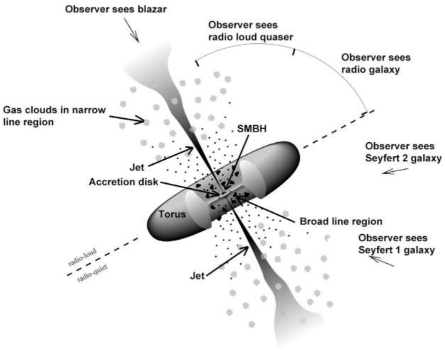
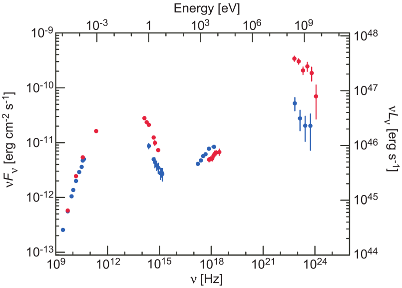
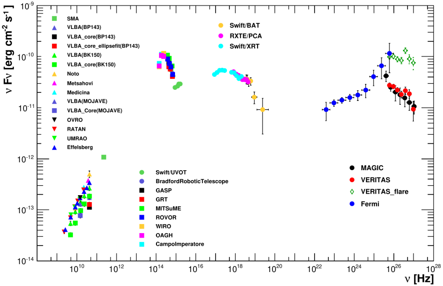


Figure: Unified view of an AGN (credit: Urry & Padovani (1995)

Spectral information: measurement of MWL SEDs

- Emitting particle spectra





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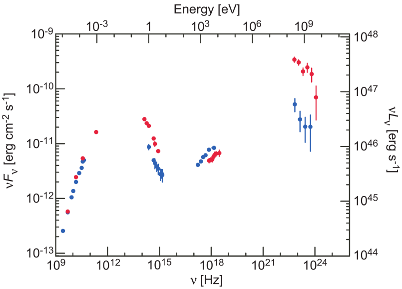

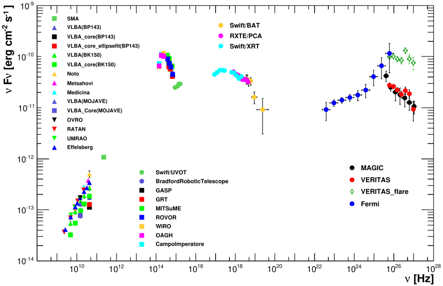

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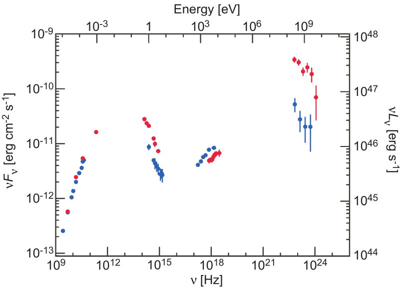

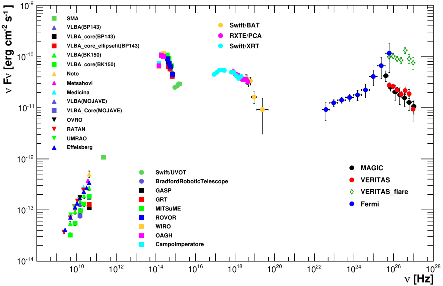

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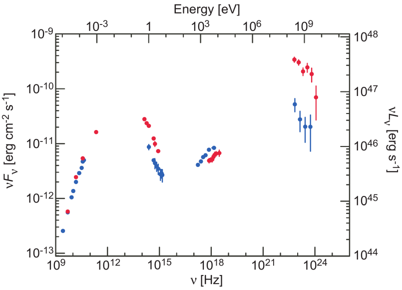

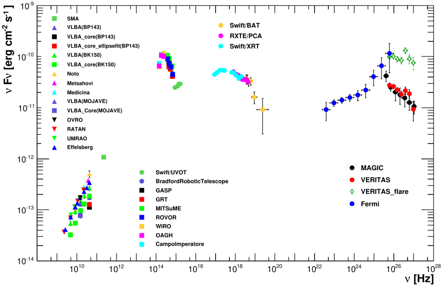

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Spectral information: measurement of MWL SEDs

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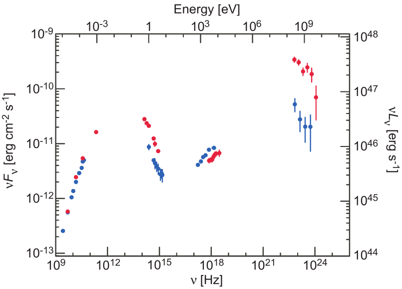
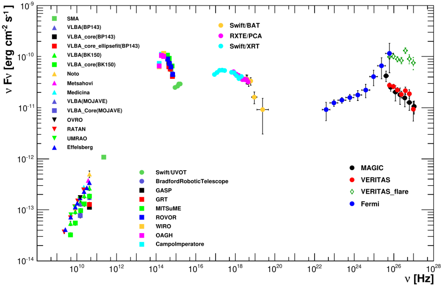
- Contributions of different emission components
- Physical processes / acceleration mechanisms

  Fermi-I? Fermi-II? magnetic reconnection?





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Different target radiation fields

Depending on location of γ-ray emitting zone in the jet, γ-rays are exposed to different photon fields:

- Accretion disk (UV, $r \lesssim 0.01$ pc)
- Broad line region (optical-UV, $r \sim 0.01 - 0.1$ pc)
- Dusty torus (infrared, $r \gtrsim 0.1$ pc)

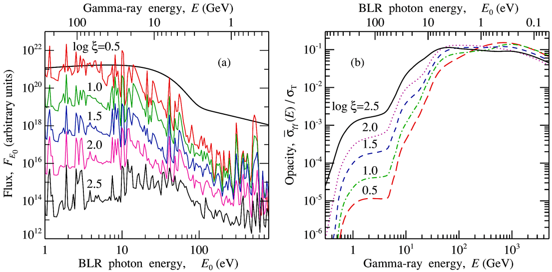


Figure: Left: typical spectrum of BLR. Right: γ-γ absorption cross-section (relative to σ_T) on BLR photon field for different energies of γ-rays. Credit: Poutanen & Stern (2010)

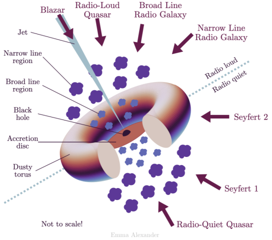


Figure: Scheme illustrating different AGN components. Credit: Emma Alexander

$\gamma - \gamma$ absorption: theory

$\gamma + \gamma \to e^- + e^+$

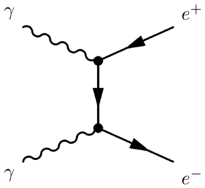
Threshold of pair production: $\epsilon_1\epsilon_2 \geq 2(1-\mu)^{-1}$, $\mu = \cos\theta$

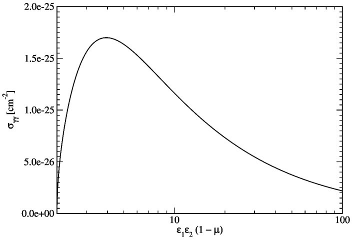
Cross-section (angle-dependent):

$$\sigma_{\gamma\gamma}(\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2, \mu) = \frac{3}{16}\sigma_{\mathrm{T}}(1-y^2)\left([3-y^4]\times \ln\left[\frac{1+y}{1-y}\right] - 2y[2-y^2]\right)$$

with $y = \sqrt{1 - 2/(\epsilon_1\epsilon_2[1-\mu])}$

Peak in cross-section at $x = \epsilon_1\epsilon_2(1-\mu) = 4$ ($\epsilon = 2\epsilon_{\mathrm{thr}}$), with $\sigma_{\gamma\gamma}^{\mathrm{peak}} \approx 0.25\sigma_{\mathrm{T}}$





Absorption features due to different target radiation fields

Target photon fields with different spectra induce different absorption features in observed γ-ray spectra

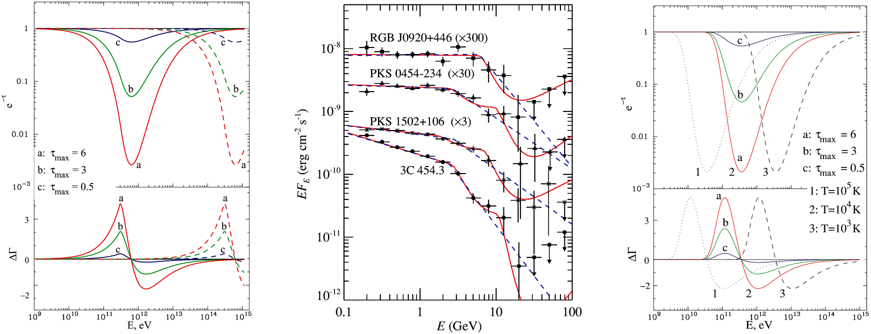


Figure: Opacity features induced by power-law seed photon field (left), BLR field (center) and blackbody (right). Credit: Poutanen & Stern (2010) and Aharonian et al. (2008)

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- **Strong** optical/γ-ray signal $\rightarrow$ **high accretion disk luminosity**
  $\rightarrow$ **stronger opacity**
- **What can we learn?**
  (1) The location of γ-ray production site in the jet
  (2) Distribution of target photon fields within the source
  (3) Emission scenarios
  (4) Constraints on the opacity: how γ-rays avoid absorption?

Source selection

We select **9** γ-ray detected FSRQs with $z > 3$ (Paliya et al. (2020))

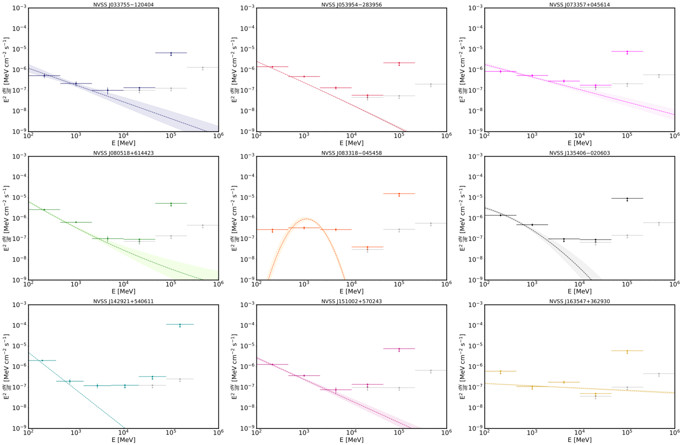
Name	R.A. (deg)	Decl. (deg)	Redshift	R_{mag}	F_{radio} (mJy)
		γ-Ray-detected blazars			
NVSS J033755−120404	54.48104	−12.06793	3.442	20.19	475.3
NVSS J053954−283956	84.97617	−28.66554	3.104	18.97	862.2
NVSS J073357+045614	113.48941	4.93736	3.01	18.76	218.8
NVSS J080518+614423	121.32575	61.73992	3.033	19.81	828.2
NVSS J083318−045458	128.32704	−4.9165	3.5	18.68	356.5
NVSS J135406−020603	208.52873	−2.10089	3.716	19.64	733.4
NVSS J142921+540611	217.34116	54.10309	3.03	19.84	1028.3
NVSS J151002+570243	227.51216	57.04538	4.313	19.89	202.0
NVSS J163547+362930	248.94681	36.49164	3.615	20.55	151.8

Fermi-LAT data analysis

Analysis: A. Acharyya

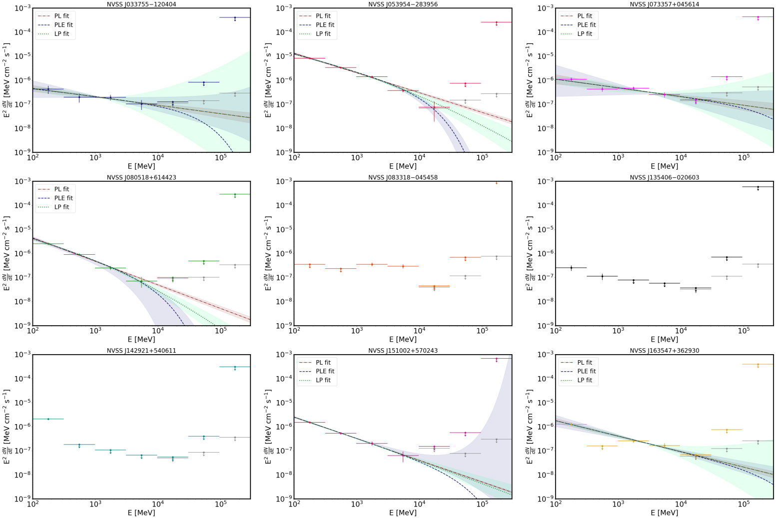
- Energy range: 0.1 GeV – 1 TeV
- **1.5 bins per decade of energy** (6 bins / 4 decades)
- 15 years of data

- Standard selection cuts
- Spectral model: 4FGL catalog shape (**power law / logparabola**)



Fermi-LAT data analysis

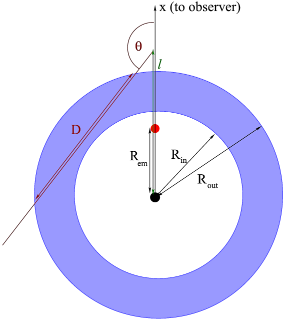
– **2 bins per decade of energy** (used for the modeling)



Model for γ-γ absorption in the BLR

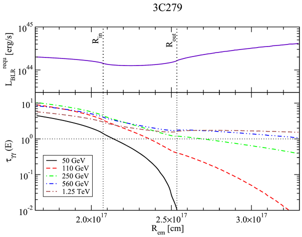
We use the model and code by Böttcher & Els (2016)

- Full **angle-dependent** γ-γ absorption cross-section
- **BLR geometry**: a shell with inner and outer radius R_1 and R_2. Assume $u_{\mathrm{BLR}} = const$ everywhere
- Computes **optical depth τ** as a function of γ-ray energy E_γ and distance of the emitting zone from the central engine R_{ez}



$$u_{\mathrm{BLR}} = \int_0^\infty d\epsilon \int_0^\infty dr \; 2\pi \int_{-1}^{1} r^2 d\mu \; \frac{j_\epsilon(\boldsymbol{r})}{4\pi r^2 c} = \\ = \frac{1}{2c} \int_0^\infty d\epsilon \; j_\epsilon^0 \int_{-1}^{1} d\mu \; D(\mu)$$

$$\tau_{\gamma-\gamma}(\epsilon_\gamma, d) = \frac{1}{2c} \int_{R_{\mathrm{ez}}}^\infty dl \int_{-1}^{1} d\mu \int_0^\infty d\epsilon \; \frac{j_\epsilon^0 D(\mu)}{\epsilon m_{\mathrm{e}} c^2} \times \\ \times \; (1-\mu_i) \; \sigma_{\gamma-\gamma}(\epsilon_\gamma, \epsilon, \mu_i)$$



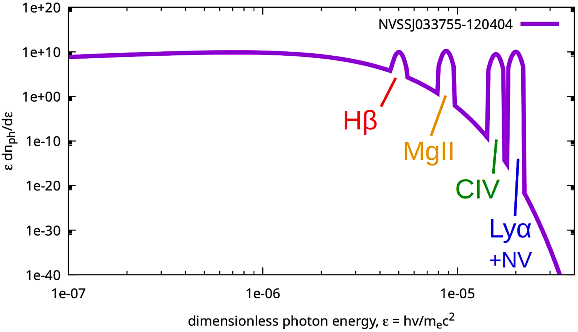
Target radiation field: $u_{\nu,\mathrm{rad}}(\nu)$

We use a template for BLR spectrum with a **blackbody continuum** ($T = 1500$ K) and a **set of 4 emission lines** as measured in real optical data. We assume that the total BLR luminosity (sum of 4 lines + continuum) is (always) 10% of L_{D}

$$u_{\mathrm{line}} = \frac{L_{\mathrm{line}}}{4\pi R_{\mathrm{BLR}}^2 c}$$

$$u_{\mathrm{cont}} = u_{\mathrm{BLR,tot}} - \frac{\Sigma L_{\mathrm{line}}}{4\pi R_{\mathrm{BLR}}^2 c}$$

$$u_{\mathrm{BLR,tot}} = \frac{0.1 L_{\mathrm{D}}}{4\pi R_{\mathrm{BLR}}^2 c}$$



Luminosity of the accretion disk

We assume that the **BLR** dominates the target radiation field, with the BLR covering fraction 10%

$$u_{\rm BLR,tot} = \frac{0.1 L_{\rm D}}{4\pi R_{\rm BLR}^2 c}$$

$$R_{\rm BLR} \approx 0.1\ L_{\rm D,46}^{1/2}\ \text{pc}$$

e.g. Hayashida et al. (2012)

We adopt $L_{\rm D}$ from Paliya et al. (2020) – estimates based on broadband SED modeling

Source #	Name (NVSS)	log10($L_{\rm D}$ erg s^{-1})
1	NVSS J033755-120404	46.36
2	NVSS J053954-283956	46.70
3	NVSS J073357+045614	46.60
4	NVSS J080518+614423	46.34
5	NVSS J083318-045458	47.15
6	NVSS J135406-020603	46.78
7	NVSS J142921+540611	46.26
8	NVSS J151002+570243	46.63
9	NVSS J163547+362930	46.30

Luminosity of optical BLR emission lines

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  - source #6, 7, 8, 9: accurate measurement through **SDSS DR18**

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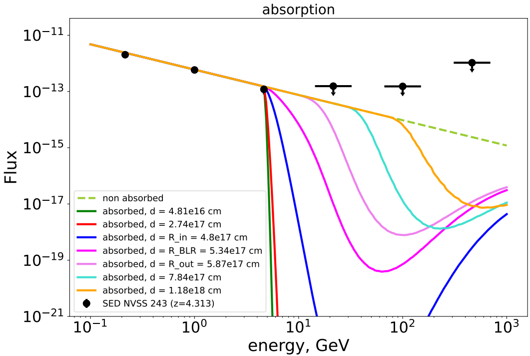
Source #	Name (NVSS)	z	log10($L_{\mathrm{Ly}\alpha+\mathrm{NV}}$)	log10(L_{CIV})	log10(L_{MgII})	log10($L_{\mathrm{H}\beta}$)
1	J033755-120404	3.442	44.8941	44.268 $\pm$ 0.193	44.73 $\pm$ 0.09	44.24 $\pm$ 0.05
2	J053954-283956	3.104	44.7335	45.091 $\pm$ 0.091	44.38 $\pm$ 0.04	43.21 $\pm$ 0.09
3	J073357+045614	3.01	44.613 $\pm$ 0.063	44.412 $\pm$ 0.063	44.09 $\pm$ 0.02	44.01 $\pm$ 0.06
4	J080518+614423	3.033	x	44.743 $\pm$ 0.095	44.39 $\pm$ 0.03	43.79 $\pm$ 0.06
5	J083318-045458	3.5	x	45.220 $\pm$ 0.111	44.63 $\pm$ 0.01	44.47 $\pm$ 0.01
6	J135406-020603	3.716	45.092 $\pm$ 0.027	44.552 $\pm$ 0.038	44.39 $\pm$ 0.06	43.95 $\pm$ 0.09
7	J142921+540611	3.03	44.36 $\pm$ 0.04	44.241 $\pm$ 0.018	44.07 $\pm$ 0.09	43.79 $\pm$ 0.11
8	J151002+570243	4.313	45.245 $\pm$ 0.019	44.857 $\pm$ 0.059	44.84 $\pm$ 0.09	x
9	J163547+362930	3.615	44.8 $\pm$ 0.22	44.305 $\pm$ 0.023	44.42 $\pm$ 0.02	43.75 $\pm$ 0.04

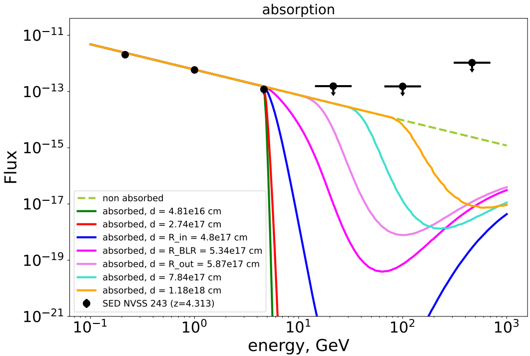
Approach

- We **fit** each spectrum with a **power law** or **logparabola** (4FGL catalog shape)



Approach

- We **fit** each spectrum with a **power law** or **logparabola** (4FGL catalog shape)
- We γ-γ **absorb** each model using the opacity code (with the relevant L_{D}), while varying the location of the γ-ray production region



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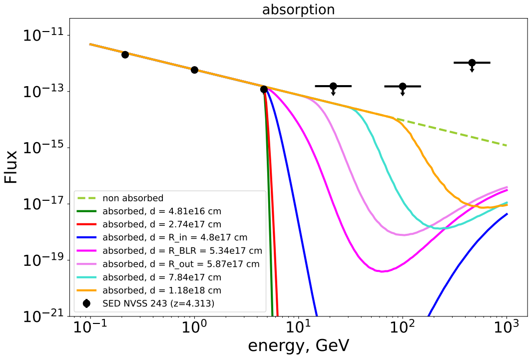
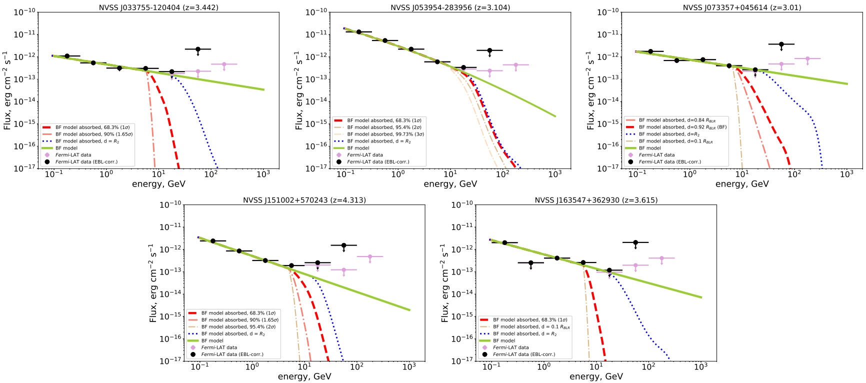
- We γ-γ **absorb** each model using the opacity code (with the relevant $L_{\rm D}$), while varying the location of the γ-ray production region
- Folded model (average over bins): $\chi^2 \leq \chi^2_{\rm min} + 1$ indicates allowed locations in the jet (1σ)



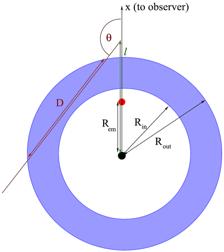
Fit results

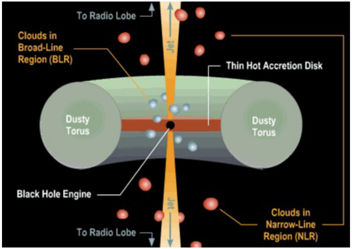
- 3/9 sources do not have enough statistics
- Of remaining 6 sources, 5 have Lyα information available
- **Lower limit** of distance from SMBH (only) for 4/9 sources
- Spectrum of Source #3 is **consistent with opacity model**



Constraints on the γ-ray production zone location

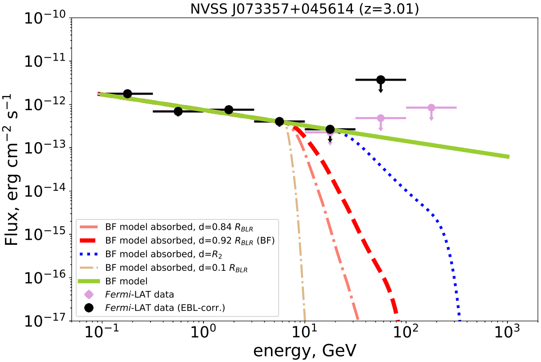
Source #	Name (NVSS)	$R_{\rm BLR}$ (cm)	$R_{\rm ez}/R_{\rm BLR}$ (1σ)	... (1.65σ)	χ^2_ν (non-abs)
1	J033755-120404	4.67×10^{17}	$\geq$ **0.92**	≥ 0.48	2.43/2
2	J053954-283956	6.9×10^{17}	$\geq$ **1.08**	≥ 1.06	3.84/2
3	J073357+045614	6.16×10^{17}	**= 0.92**	=	5.13/2
4	J080518+614423	–	–	–	–
5	J083318-045458	–	–	–	–
6	J135406-020603	–	–	–	–
7	J142921+540611	–	–	–	–
8	J151002+570243	6.37×10^{17}	$\geq$ **1.01**	≥ 0.92	2.57/2
9	J163547+362930	4.36×10^{17}	$\geq$ **0.84**	NA	0.76/1





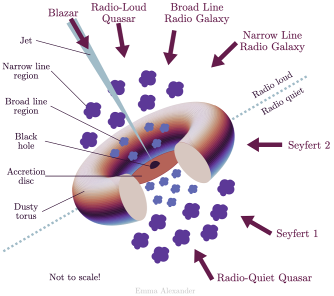
Particular case: Source #3

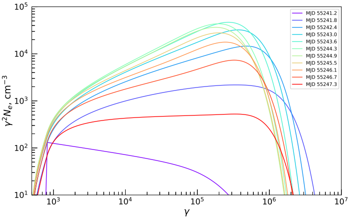
- Spectrum of Source #3 is **consistent with opacity model**
- An improved χ^2 ($\Delta\chi^2 < 0$) is achieved for the **absorbed model** in the range $\boldsymbol{R_{\rm ez}/R_{\rm BLR} \geq 0.84}$
- The best fit is achieved for $\boldsymbol{R_{\rm ez}/R_{\rm BLR} = 0.92}$ $\rightarrow$ emitting zone WITHIN BLR



Discussion of results

- **The observed cutoff in the γ-ray spectra cannot be distinguished from e.g. cutoff in the particle spectrum** $\rightarrow$ mostly lower limits on the emitting zone location





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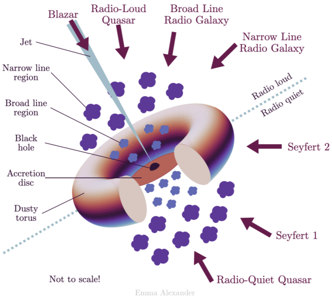
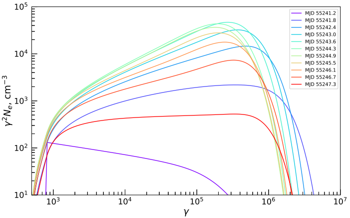
- Very particular location – shocked region in the jet consistently in the vicinity of BLR shell

  The emitting zone **cannot be too far** from BLR as well $\rightarrow$ production of γ-rays via IC





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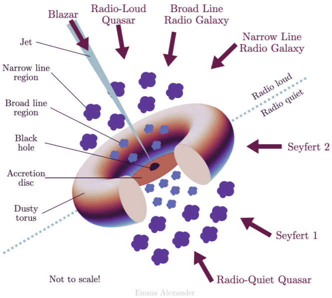
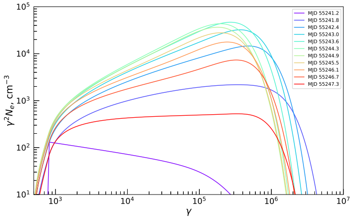
- **Source #2 (NVSS J053954-283956)** – tighter constraints can be derived (emitting zone close to inner BLR radius)



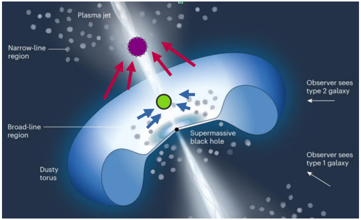


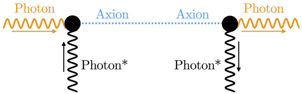
Discussion of results

- **Second emitting zone?**
  – full physical modeling required
  – correlation between different bands

- Hadronic models
  – p-γ process – internal opacity

- Exotic physics, e.g. **photon-axion coupling in magnetic field** ?





Outline

1. Introduction to Blazars
   - Blazars: what can spectra tell us?
   - γ-γ opacity
2. Searching for Opacity Features in High-z Blazars
   - Source selection and data analysis
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   - Optical data: target photon field
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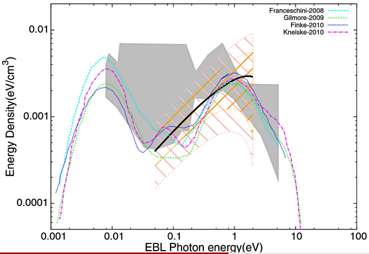
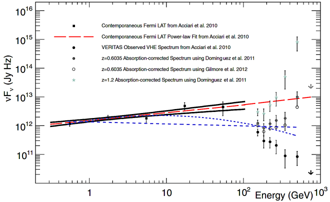
3. Future work and prospects
4. Summary

Constraining the EBL

- The best-fit χ^2 for the **EBL-deabsorbed** intrinsic spectrum for different EBL models (Saldana-Lopez 2021; Finke 2022; Franceschini 2018; ...)
  - limited statistics of the data
  - full physical modeling is preferred
- **Statistical approach**: spectral index as a function of redshift z
  - limited selection of sources





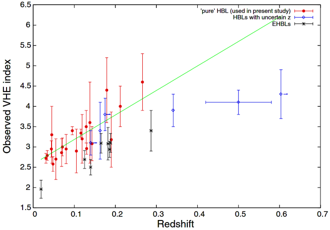


Figure: (Top): example of de-absorption of an observed γ-ray spectrum using different EBL models (Furniss et al. 2013). Bottom: distribution of observed VHE spectral index of a selection of HBLs as a function of redshift (Sinha et al. 2014)

Studying internal absorption in other blazars

- **Intermediate redshift blazars (z=1–2)**: an optimal balance between the γ-ray statistics and the opacity feature downshift

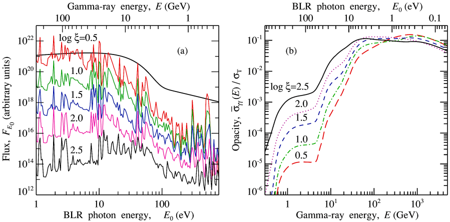


Figure: Left: typical spectrum of BLR. Right: γ-γ absorption cross-section (relative to σ_T) on BLR photon field for different energies of γ-rays.
Credit: Poutanen & Stern (2010)

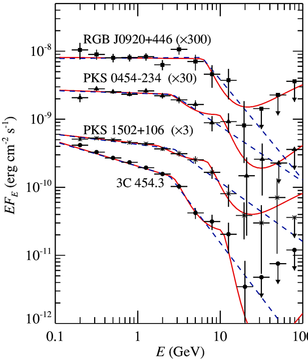


Figure: Opacity features induced by the BLR field (Poutanen & Stern (2010))

Beyond leptonic models: hadronic scenario

$$\pi^{\pm} \rightarrow \mu^{\pm} + \nu_{\mu}(\bar{\nu}_{\mu})$$
$$\mu^{\pm} \rightarrow e^{\pm} + \bar{\nu}_{\mu}(\nu_{\mu}) + \nu_{e}(\bar{\nu}_{e})$$

TXS 0506+056

– IceCube $\sim$ 290 TeV ν (2017)
+ GeV (*Fermi*-LAT) and VHE (MAGIC) flare

– ν-flare (2014 – 2015): no γ-ray activity

Assuming **photo-hadron** (rather than p-p):

$$E'_{\nu} \approx 0.05 E'_{\rm p}, \quad s \approx E'_{\gamma} E'_{\rm p} \approx E^2_{\Delta^+}$$

- **Target field: X-ray** (Böttcher et al. (2022))
- Synchrotron-supported cascade is ruled out (Reimer et al. (2019))

⇒ Target photons originate outside the jet?

! GeV γ-rays **absorbed** on the target field

→ **Strong ν sources: WEAK at GeV γ-ray !**

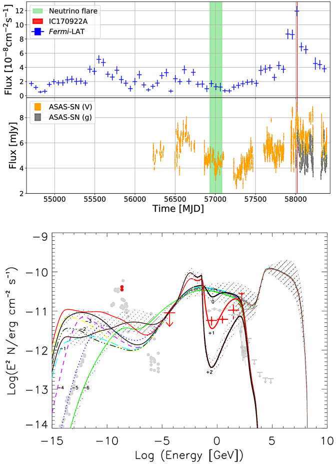


Figure: (Top) *Fermi*-LAT and optical LC of TXS 0506+056. Green – neutrino flare in 2014 – 2015. (Bottom) Simulations of synchrotron-supported cascades to generate the observed neutrino flare flux (credit: Reimer et al. (2019))

Prospects with CTA

The next generation IACT instrument. Operational by 202**?**

Large Size Telescope (LST) particularly helpful thanks to the low-energy threshold and sensitivity

- Sensitivity $\nearrow$ by a factor of $\sim$ **10**
- Northern and Southern site (La Palma and Chile)
- Energy range: $\sim$**30 GeV** – $\sim$**300 TeV**
- Substantially better angular, spectral and timing resolution

$\rightarrow$ **Much tighter constraints on γ–γ opacity, γ-ray production site location and EBL**

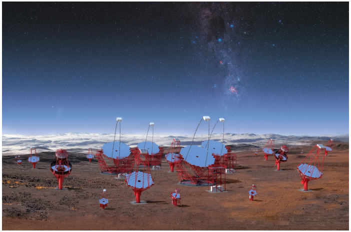


Figure: Top: CGI rendering of the CTA array view; Bottom: LST in La Palma (credit: ESO/CTA)

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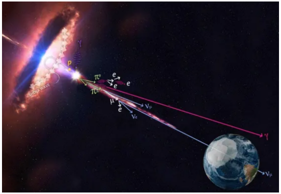
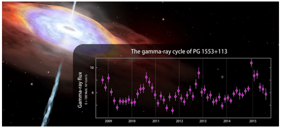
Summary

- **Exploring high-redshift blazars allows to search for γ-γ opacity signatures at lower energies**
- We established **constraints on the location of the γ-ray production region** in the jet for 5 blazars with redshifts z $= 3 - 4.3$
- One needs to understand why the γ-ray production (shocked region in the jet) takes place mostly close to the **BLR outer boundary**
- One of the sources displays a possible **$\gamma - \gamma$ opacity feature** at energy $\sim$ **8 GeV**. **Emitting zone located within the BLR close to the INNER boundary**
- Full modeling required – leptonic, hadronic, multi-zone models
- Promising prospects with CTA





$\Rightarrow$ ApJ paper in preparation, to be submitted (hopefully) within this month

Thank you!