Testimonial

Wajih Jamal

I had the privilege of working with Dr. Maria Dainotti during the early stages of my research career, and that collaboration shaped the way I now think about astrophysics. What struck me immediately was her openness—rather than assigning narrow tasks, she involved me directly in ongoing questions at the frontier of gamma-ray burst (GRB) studies. It was a demanding environment, but also one that gave me room to grow quickly.

Most of my work was centered on GRB afterglows. I came in with curiosity about how transient light curves encode physical information, but little hands-on experience. Maria guided me through the process of treating observational data not as abstract numbers but as signatures of jet dynamics, synchrotron emission regimes, and interactions with circumburst media. A large part of this effort fed into the construction of the GRB optical catalog, a dataset that gathered more than sixty thousand points across hundreds of bursts. Working on something of that scale taught me both the excitement and the challenge of coordinating data from different sources, instruments, and reductions.

Within this framework, I was able to explore several directions: the temporal-spectral closure relations that test fireball models; the investigation of colour evolution in optical afterglows; and the search for correlations in the optical catalog that could, in the future, help GRBs serve as cosmological indicators alongside Type Ia supernovae.

Maria's mentorship style was instrumental in making this work meaningful. She encouraged me to get involved in every stage—analysis, interpretation, writing, even discussions on strategy when deciding how to present results. That level of inclusion is rare for students entering the field, and it forced me to sharpen skills I might otherwise have delayed developing: weighing statistical methods against astrophysical intuition, identifying biases in sample selection, and learning to defend choices in a scientific discussion.

Equally important, Maria created a group culture that was collaborative rather than hierarchical. I found myself exchanging ideas with students at different levels and with colleagues from institutions around the world. That exposure gave me a sense of the broader community, and it also taught me how differently people approach the same dataset. The diversity of perspectives, combined with Maria's guidance, made the research richer and the process far more engaging than I expected when I began.

Looking back, I realize that this collaboration not only introduced me to GRB astrophysics but also gave me a model of how serious research can be carried out: technically rigorous, conceptually ambitious, and at the same time supportive of the people involved. It set a standard for the kind of scientist I hope to become, and I remain grateful for the chance to have been part of it.

Sincerely,