

Reionised bubbles around primordial galaxies

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DARK and DAWN

In the beginning, the Universe was dark...

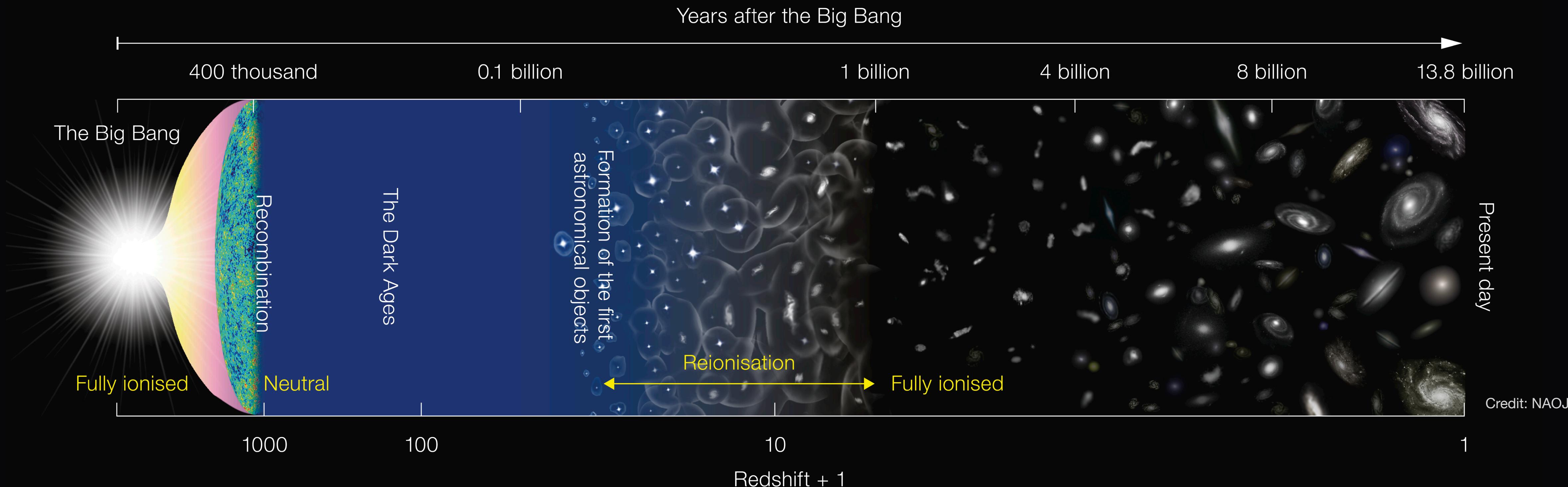
... until the appearance of the first stars.

The formation of these first objects would have a lasting impact on the rest of the Universe's history.

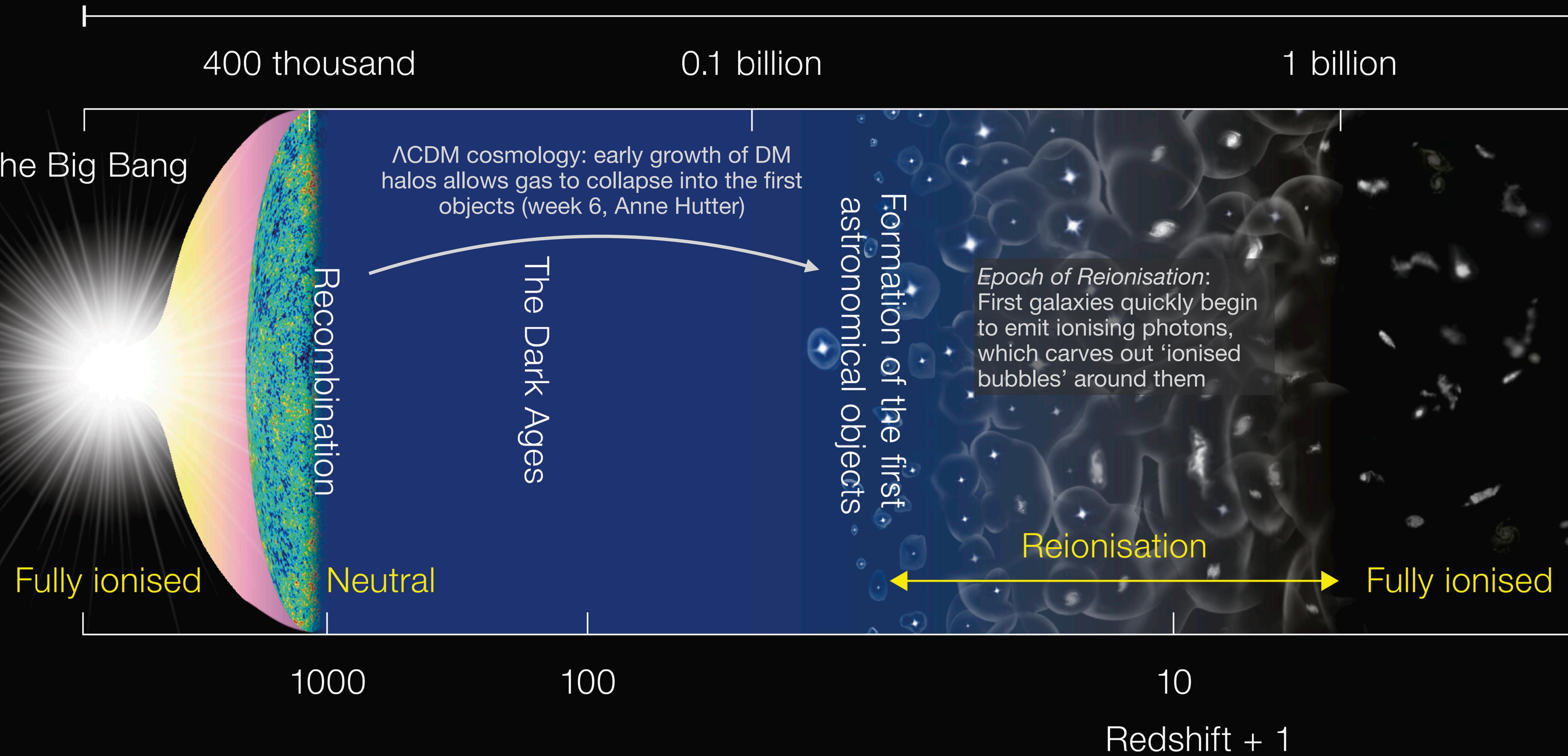
DARK

DAWN

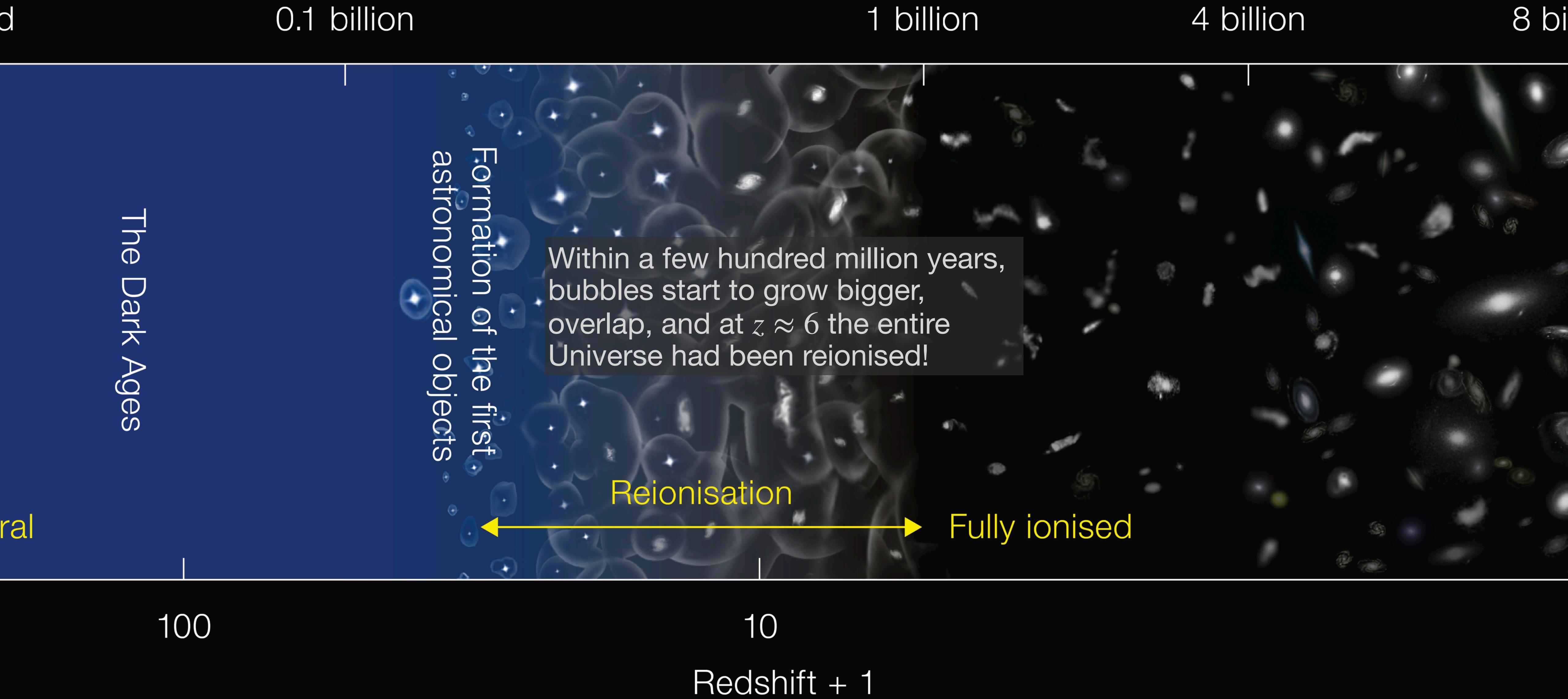
An overview of galaxy evolution



Years after the Big Bang



Years after the Big Bang



How do we know galaxies drive reionisation?

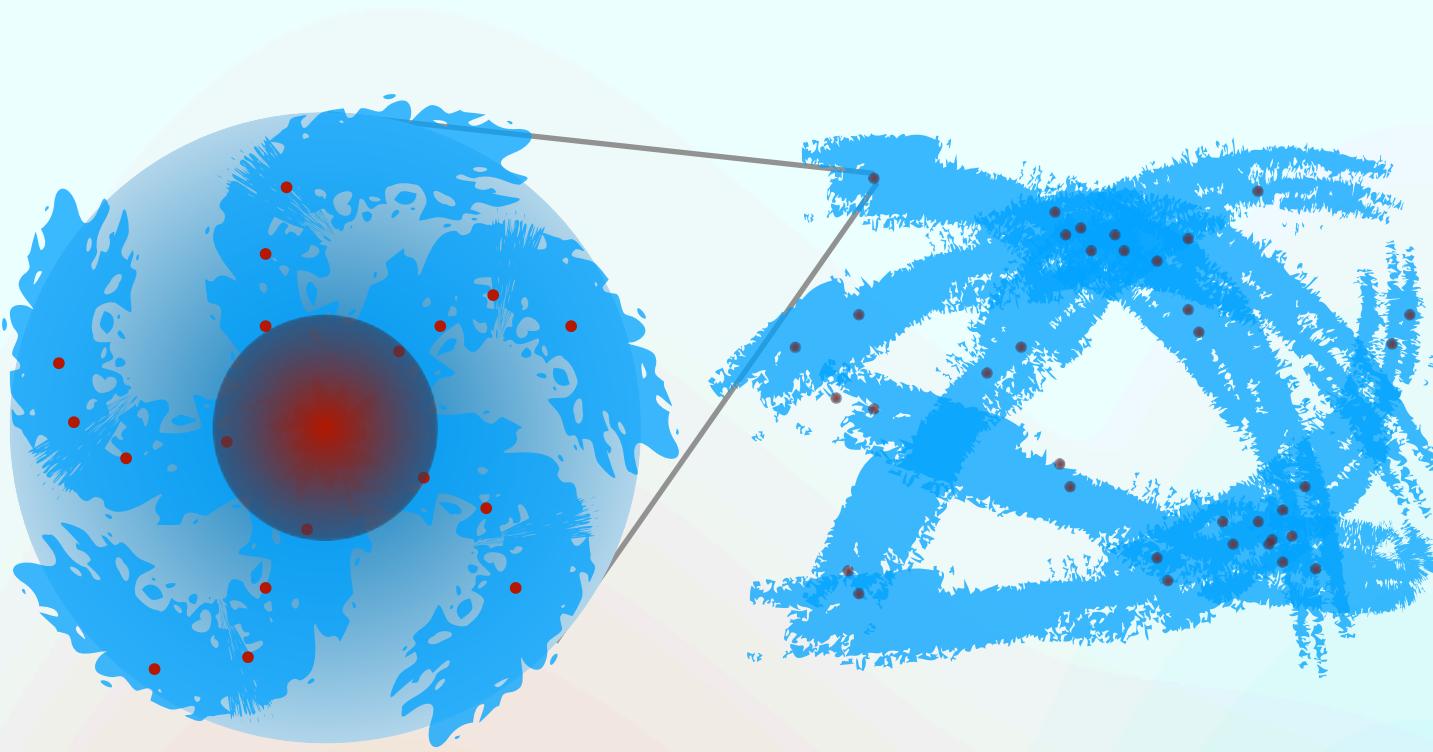
Work out the cosmic density of ionising photons, \dot{n}_{ion} (Mpc^{-3}), produced* by galaxies. Ingredients:

- Observed volume density of non-ionising, monochromatic ultraviolet (UV; wavelength of 1500 Å) luminosity output by galaxies, ρ_{UV} ($\text{erg s}^{-1} \text{Hz}^{-1} \text{Mpc}^{-3}$)
- Conversion factor from observed non-ionising UV flux density to ionising photon rate, ξ_{ion} (Hz erg^{-1})
- Effective fraction of ionising photons that escapes galaxies, f_{esc} (difficult to measure!)

$$\text{Combined: } \dot{n}_{\text{ion}} = \rho_{\text{UV}} \xi_{\text{ion}} f_{\text{esc}}$$

Given statistical properties of the observed galaxy population and under reasonable assumptions, galaxies can provide sufficient ionising photons to complete reionisation by redshift $z \approx 6$
(Robertson et al. 2013, 2015; Finkelstein et al. 2019)

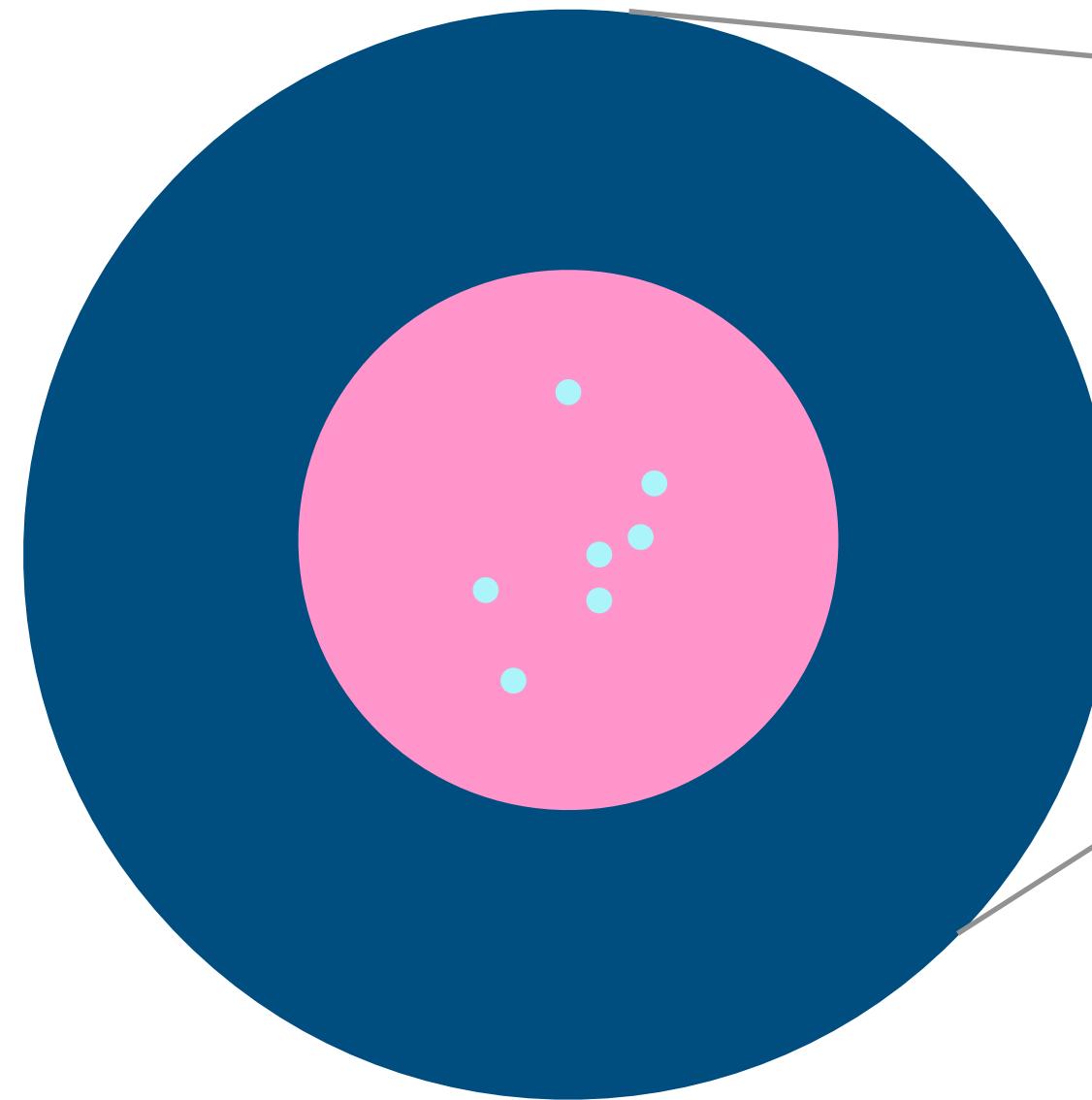
* Agnostic to the actual sources of ionising photons: stars, accreting supermassive black holes (perhaps higher escape fractions from driving powerful outflows; week 9, Minju Lee)?



Outside in: galaxy evolution in a cosmological setting

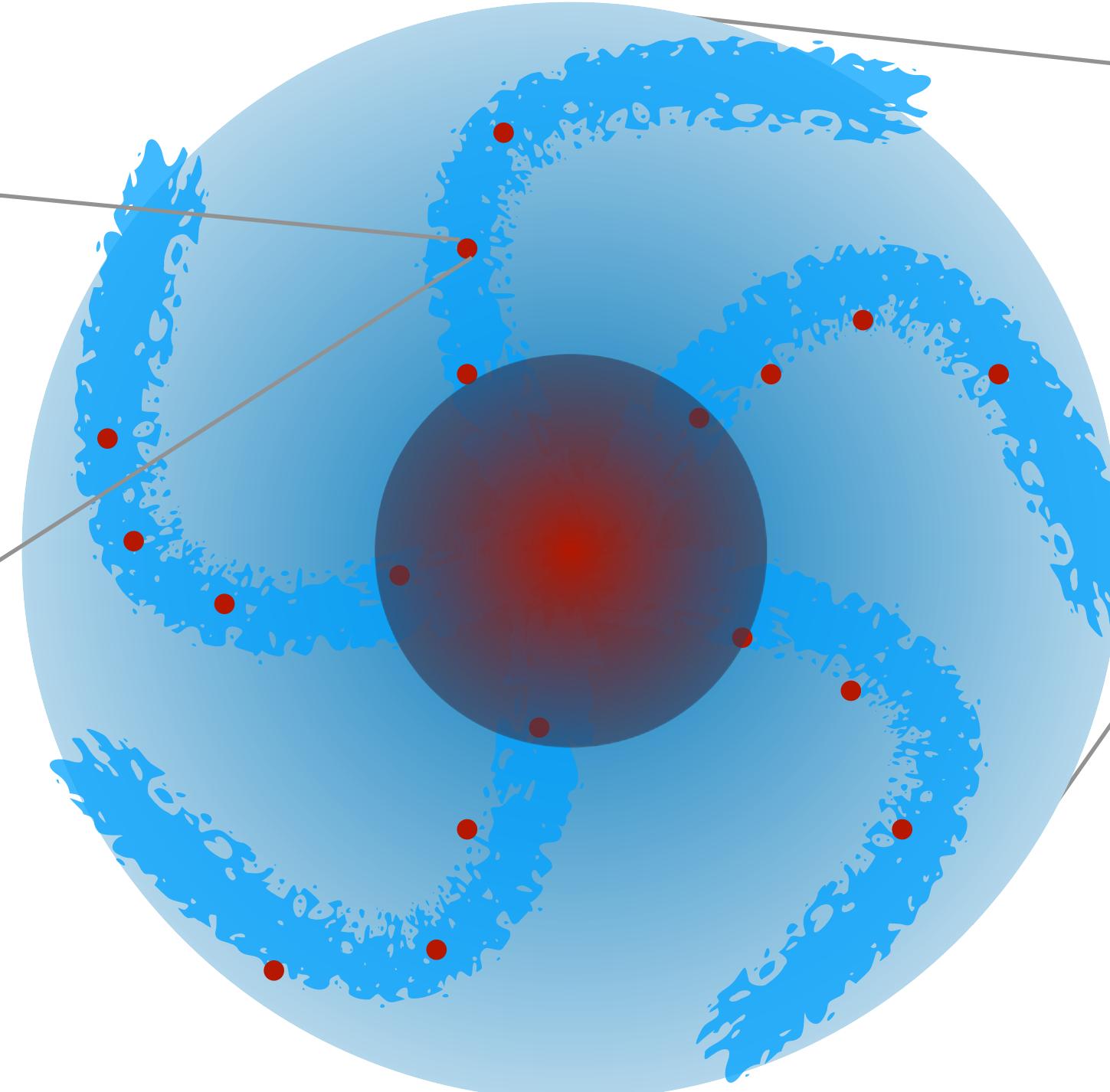
Physical scales in galaxy evolution

See also: week 7, Francesco Valentino



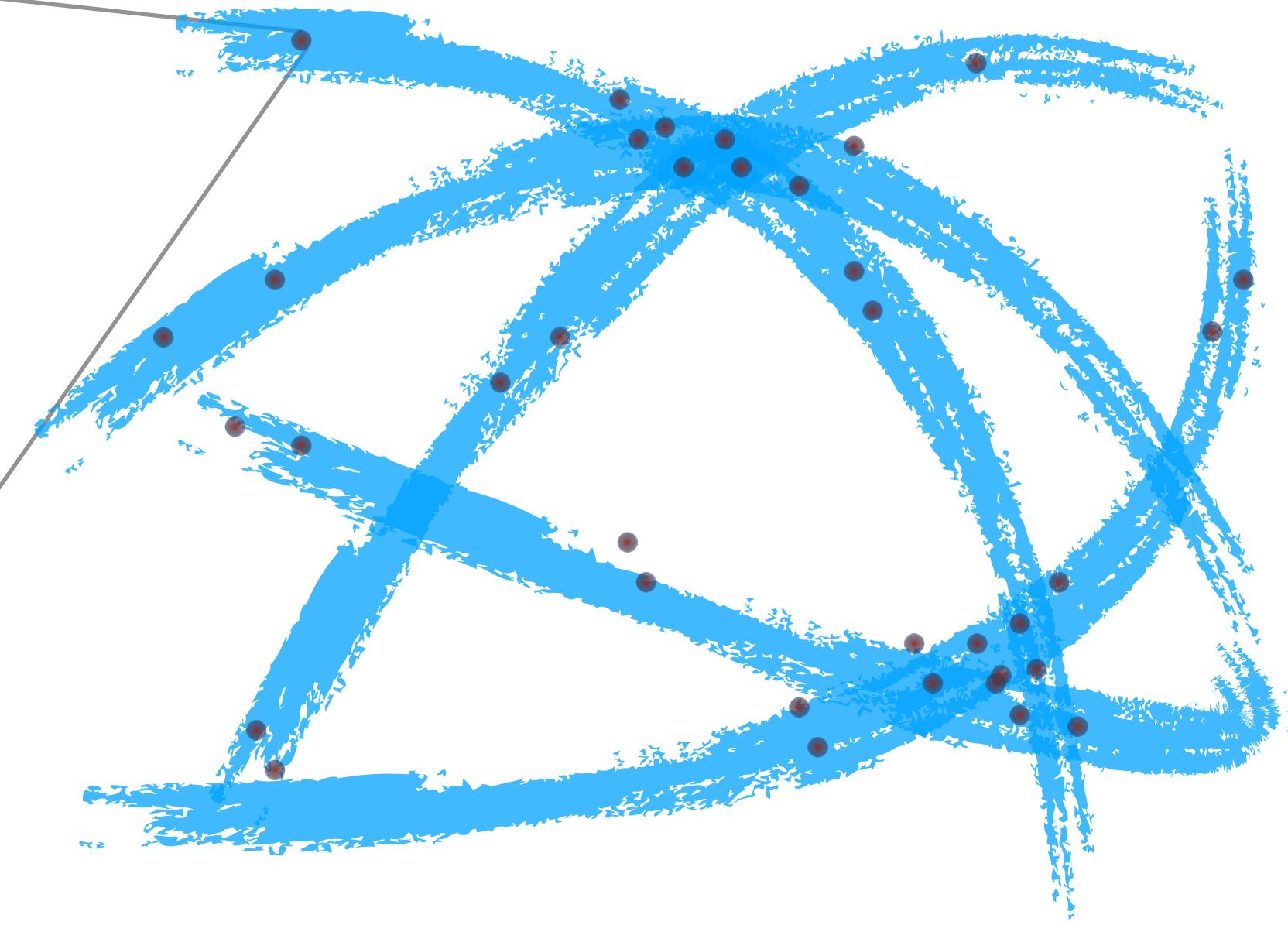
Giant molecular cloud (GMC), star clusters:

- 1-10 parsec (pc)
- 1-10 Megayear (Myr)
- 1-10 km/s



Galaxy:

- 1-10 kiloparsec (kpc)
- 100 Megayear (Myr)
- 10-100 km/s (stellar)



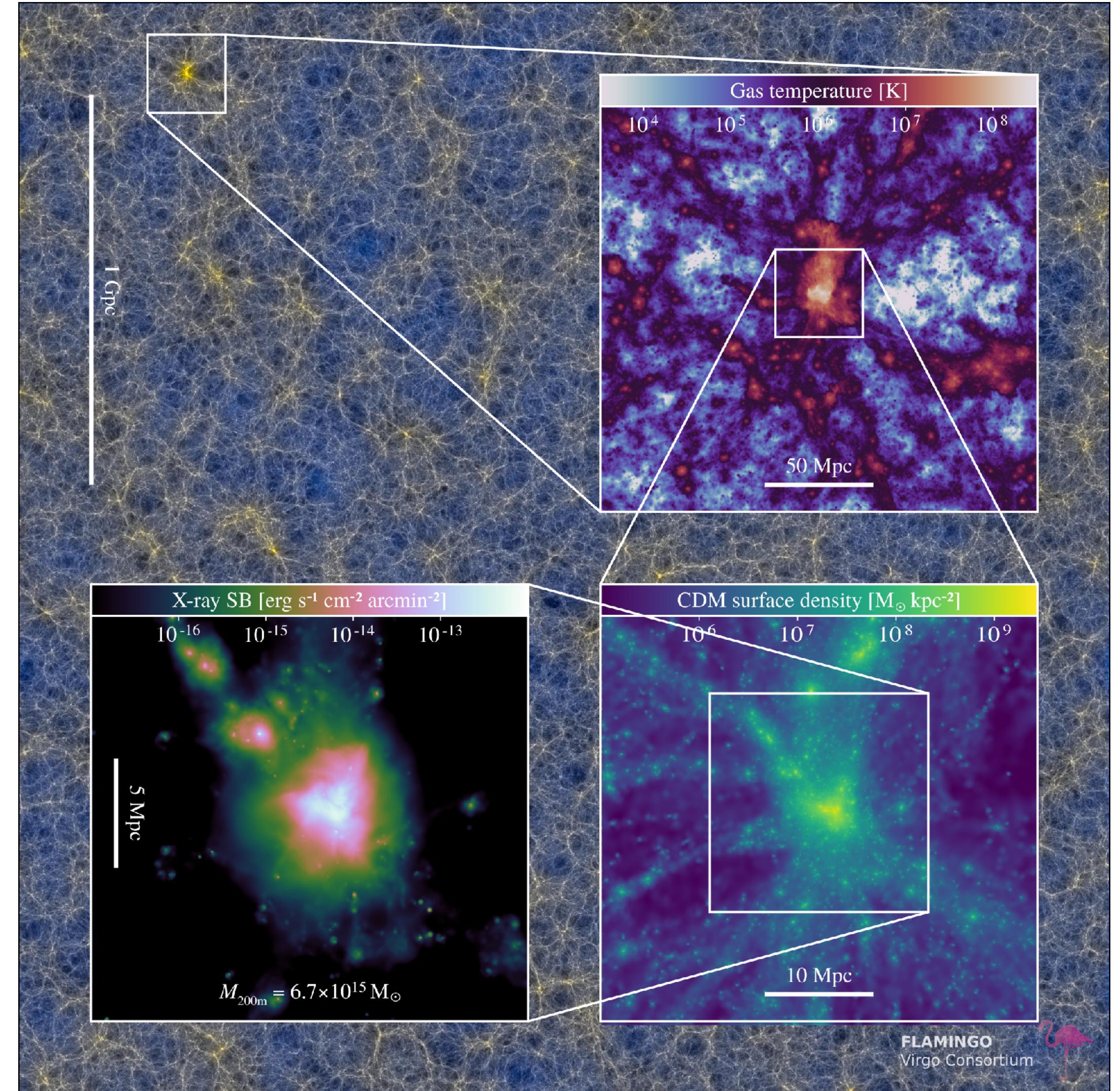
Galaxy groups/clusters, intergalactic medium (IGM):

- Megaparsec (Mpc)
- Gigayear (Gyr)
- >1000 km/s (apparent)

Galaxies in the cosmic web

FLAMINGO simulations (Schaye et al. 2023)

- Reionisation requires us to consider galaxies as embedded in structures on (much) larger scales
- Hydrodynamical simulations required to capture complex interplay between galaxies and their environments
- Star formation and gas accretion by black holes taking place on (sub-)parsec scales influences galaxy as a whole, and beyond (IGM)



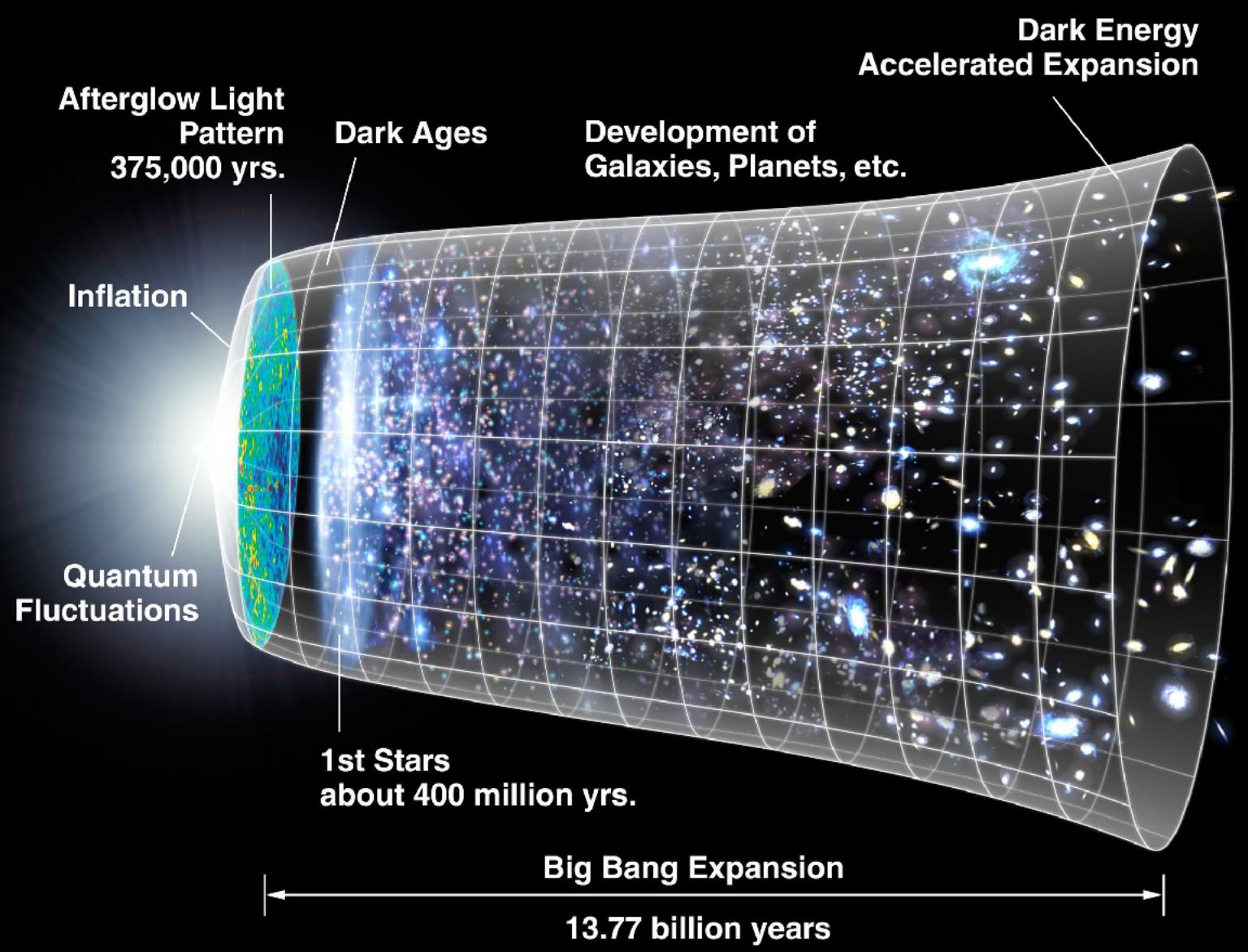
Space-time metric in an expanding universe

Cosmological Principle (homogeneous and isotropic universe) results in a metric with all spatial time dependence capture in the scale factor $a(t)$:

$$ds^2 = c^2 dt^2 - a^2(t) \left[\frac{dr^2}{1 - Kr^2} + r^2 (d\theta^2 + \sin^2 \theta d\phi^2) \right].$$

Under a coordinate transformation to comoving coordinates, $d\chi = dr/\sqrt{1 - Kr^2}$, a light ray following a null geodesic ($ds^2 = 0$) travelling on a radial trajectory ($d\theta = d\phi = 0$) obeys

$$\frac{d\chi}{dt} = \pm \frac{c}{a(t)}$$



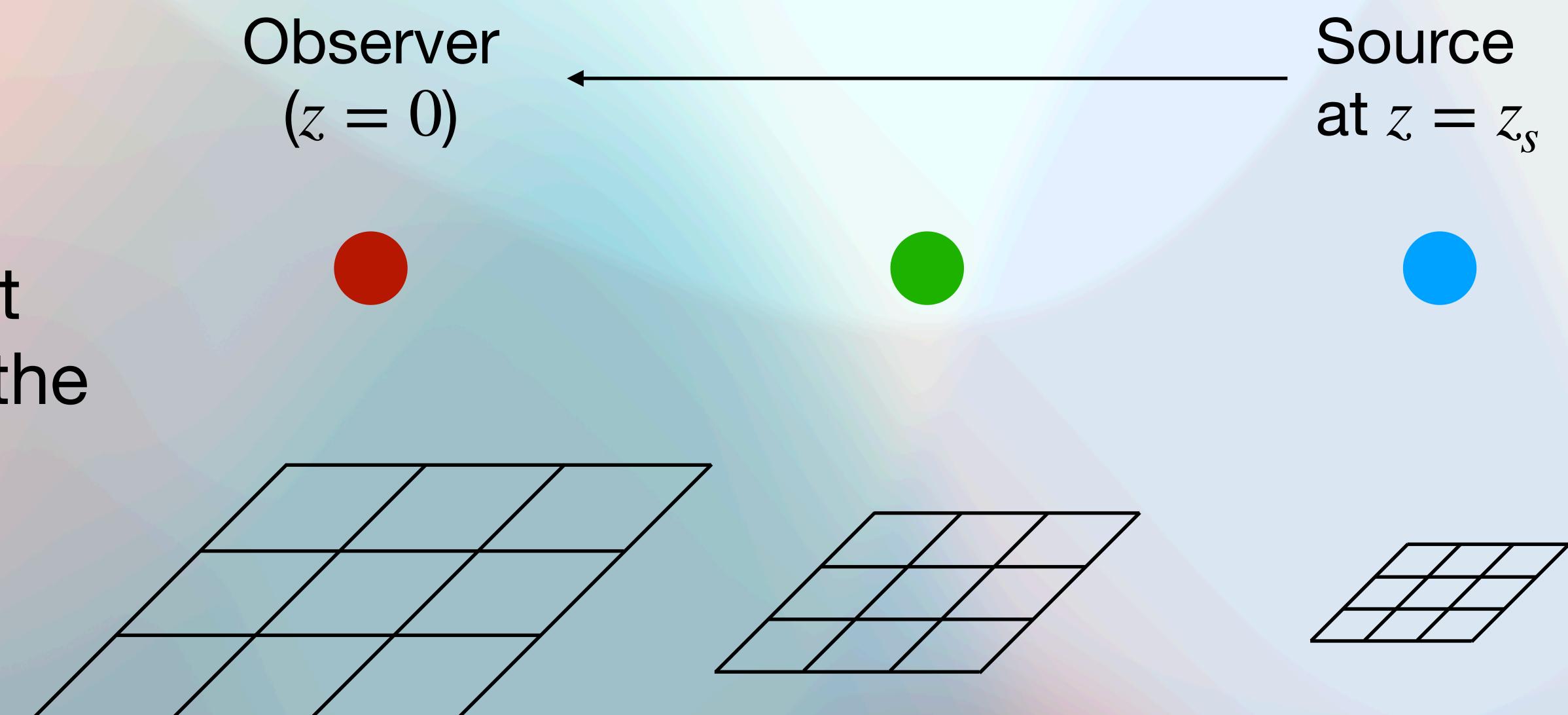
Observing distant galaxies in an expanding universe

While light travels from a source at cosmological distance, the Universe around it expands, causing the wavelength of the photon to redshift by a factor

$$\frac{\lambda_{\text{obs}}}{\lambda_{\text{emit}}} = \frac{a_0}{a(t)} = 1 + z$$

where typically the present-day scale factor is set to $a_0 = 1$. The rate of expansion is measured by the Hubble parameter $H(z) = \dot{a}/a$, which at $z = 0$ (today) represents the Hubble constant:

$$H_0 = \dot{a}/a \Big|_{z=0} \approx 70 \text{ km s}^{-1} \text{ Mpc}^{-1}$$



Measuring distances in an expanding universe

For the photon trajectory with a minus sign (for an inward radial trajectory),

$$\frac{d\chi}{dz} = - \frac{c}{a(t)} \frac{dt}{dz} = - \frac{c}{a} \frac{dt}{da} \frac{da}{dz} = \frac{c}{\dot{a}a} \frac{1}{(1+z)^2} = \frac{c}{H(z)}.$$

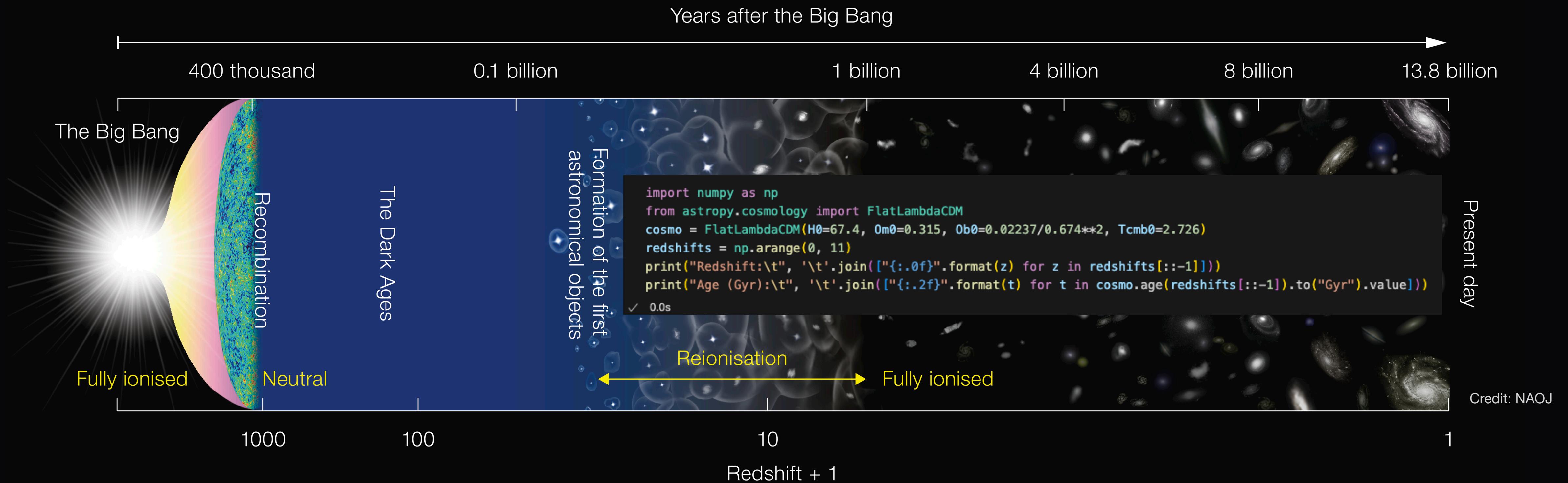
We can always get the (comoving) geodesic distance to a source at redshift z via

$$\chi(z) = \int_0^{\chi} d\chi' = \int_0^z dz' \frac{d\chi}{dz'} = \int_0^z dz' \frac{c}{H(z')} ,$$

but practically, we simply express cosmological distances in terms of redshift

Redshift and lookback time

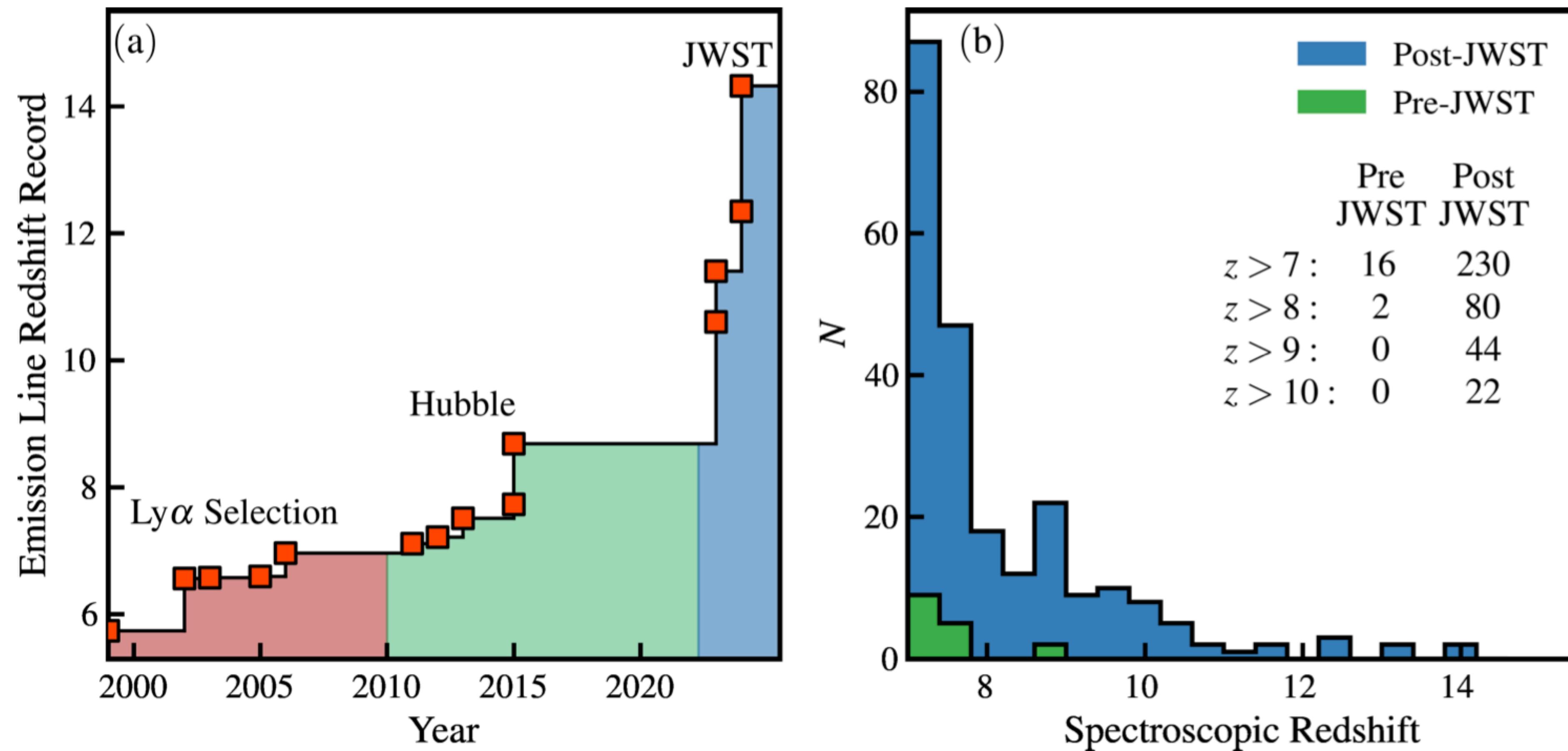
Scale monotonically (but highly nonlinearly!)



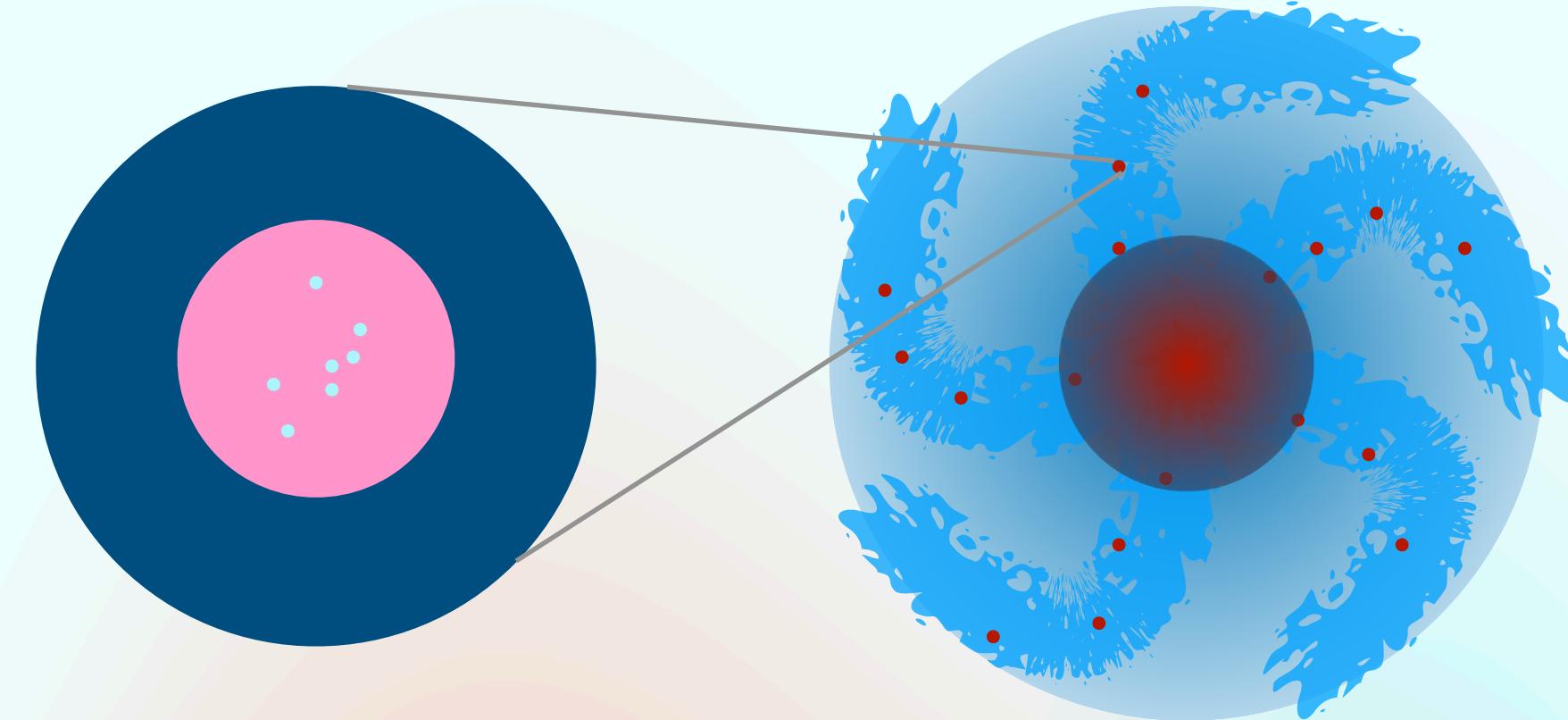
astropy-powered
astropy.org

Redshift:	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Age (Gyr):	0.47	0.54	0.64	0.76	0.93	1.17	1.53	2.14	3.27	5.84	13.79

Redshift confirmation: historical perspective

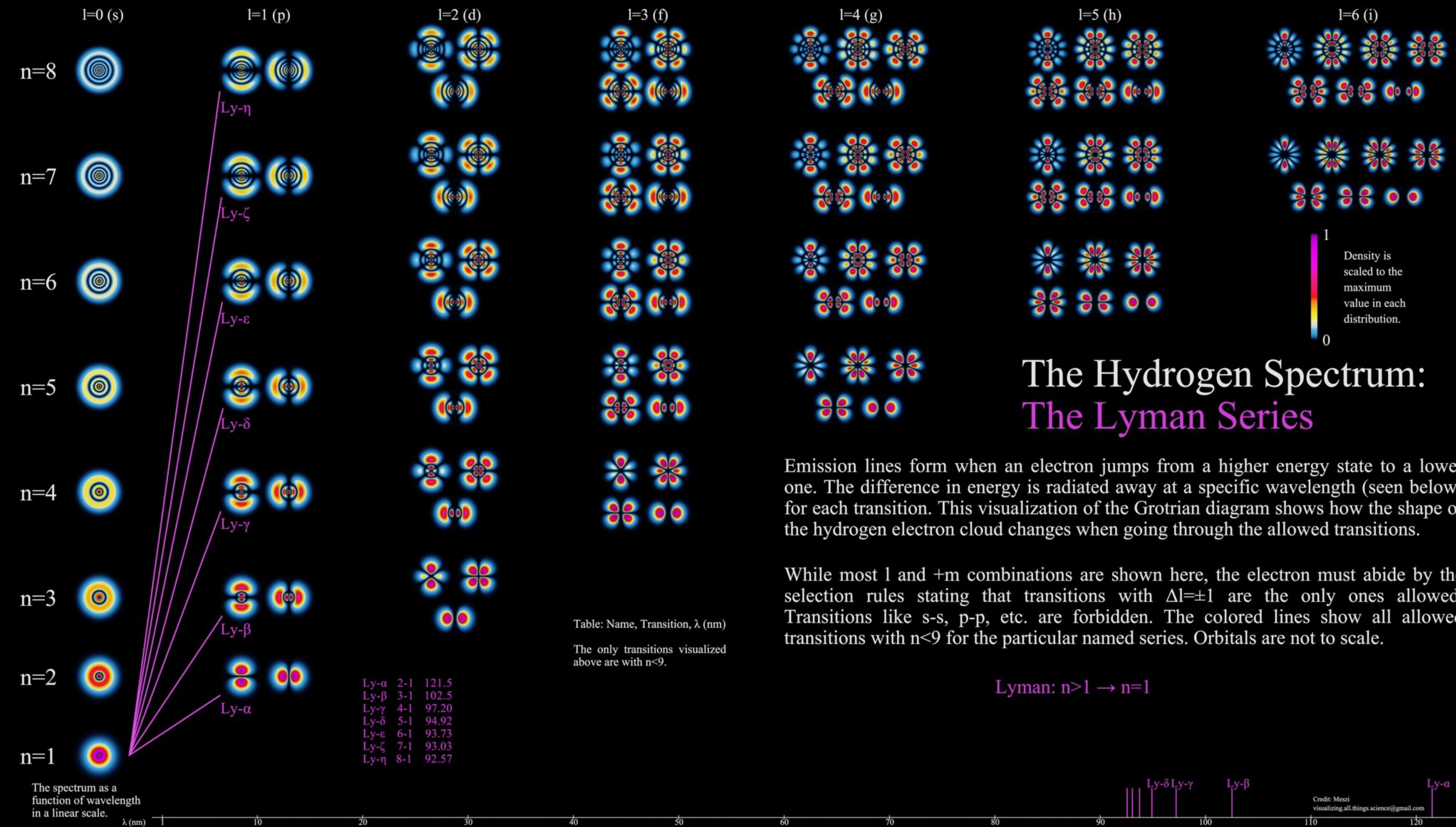


Stark et al. (2025)

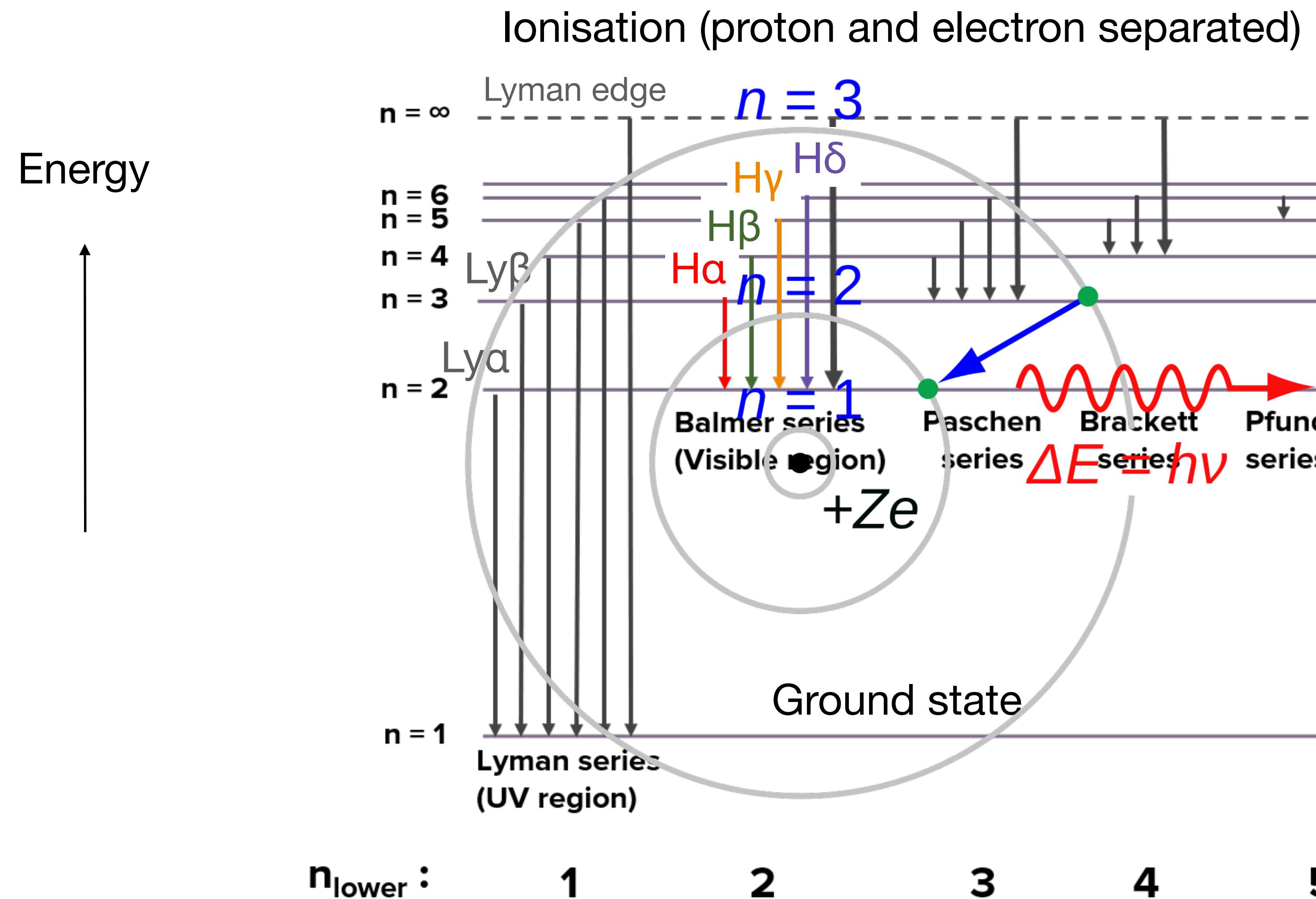


**Inside out: how quantum physics
manifests on galaxy scales**

Hydrogen atom (HI)



Hydrogen electronic transitions in Bohr model



Wavelengths ($E = hc/\lambda$)

Balmer series

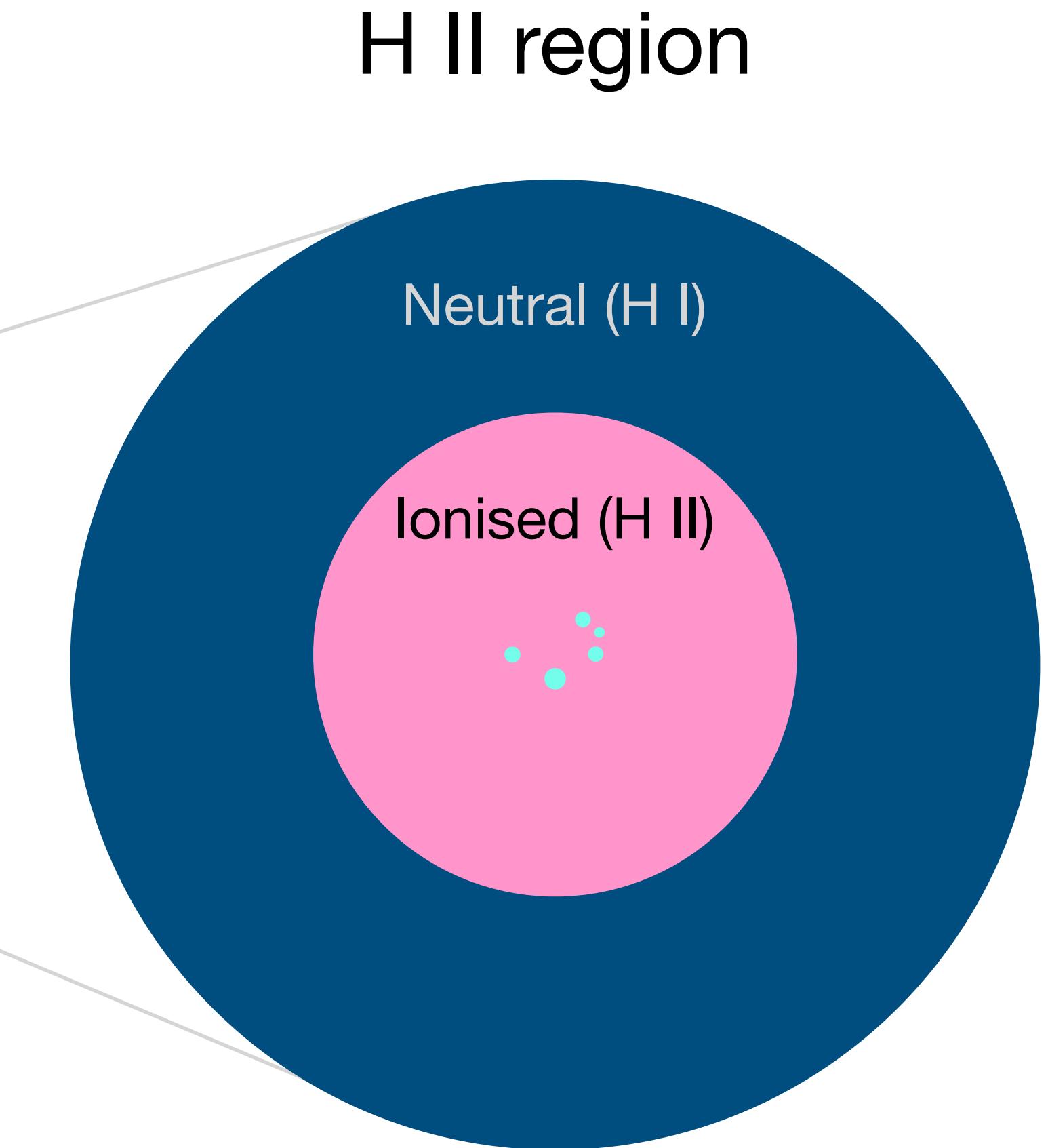
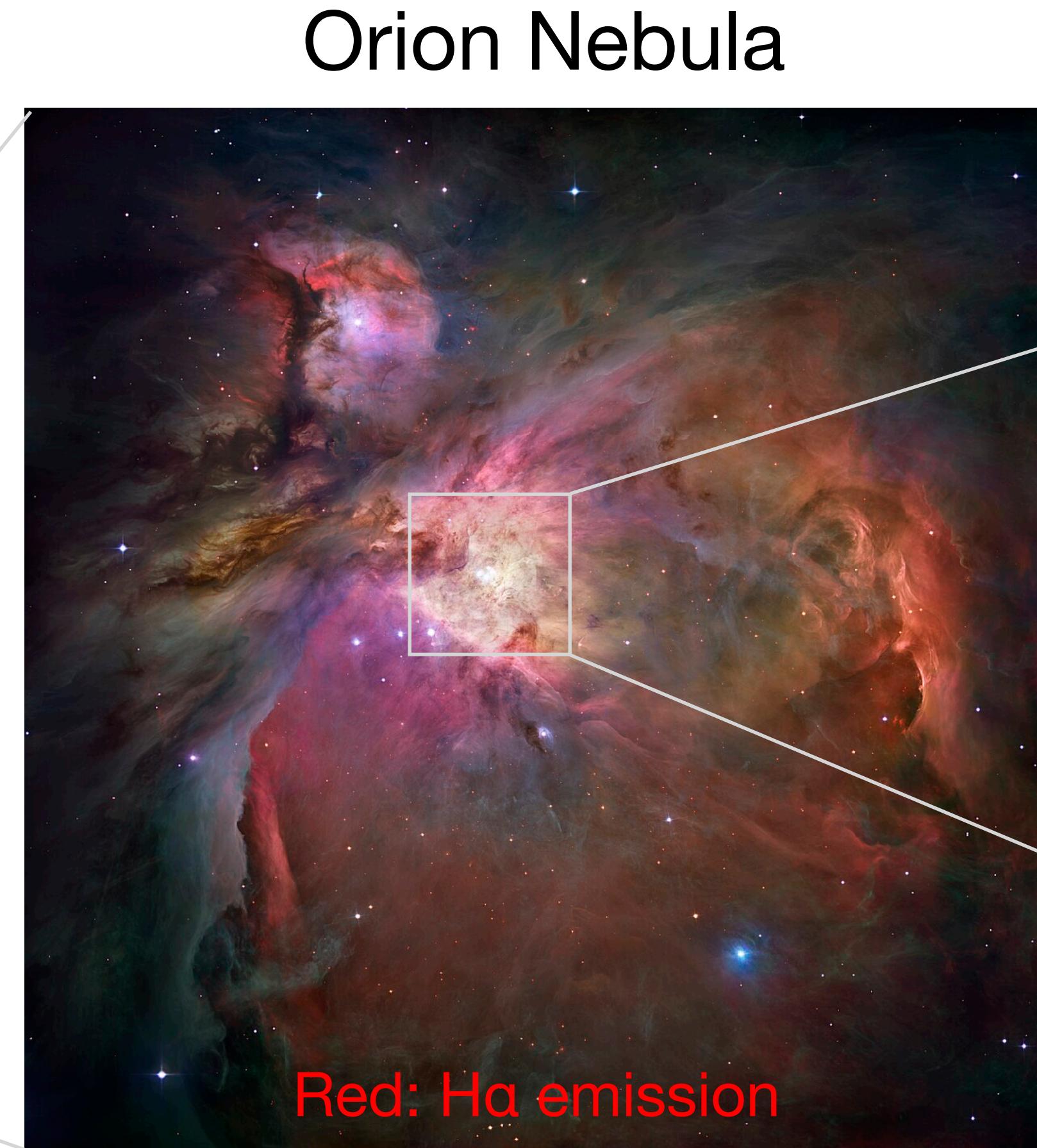
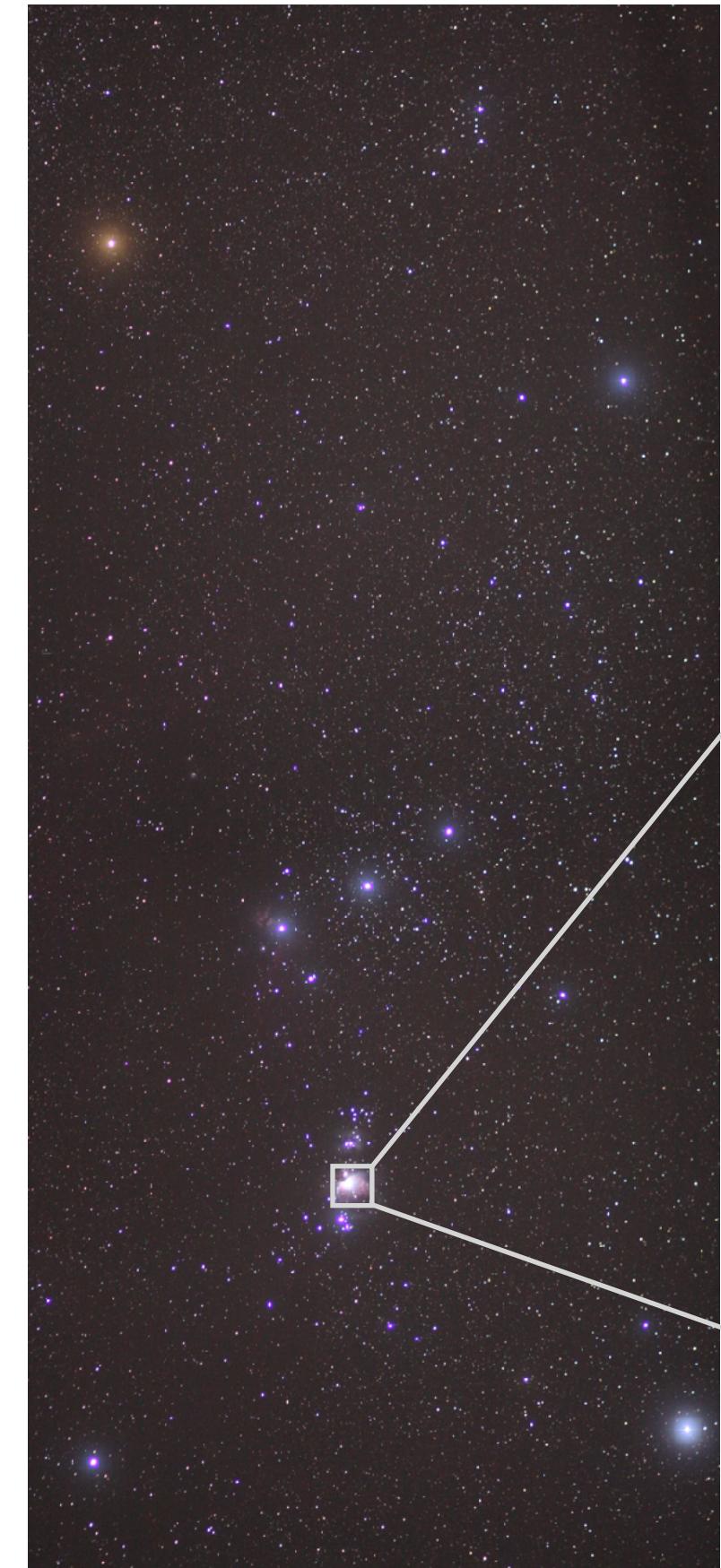
H α : 6564.6 Å (visible red)
H β : 4862.7 Å
H γ : 4341.7 Å
H δ : 4102.9 Å

Lyman series

Ly α : 1215.7 Å (far ultraviolet)
Ly β : 1025.7 Å
Lyman edge: 911.8 Å

Lyman continuum (LyC) photons (below Lyman edge) are able to ionise neutral hydrogen

H II region example: Orion Nebula



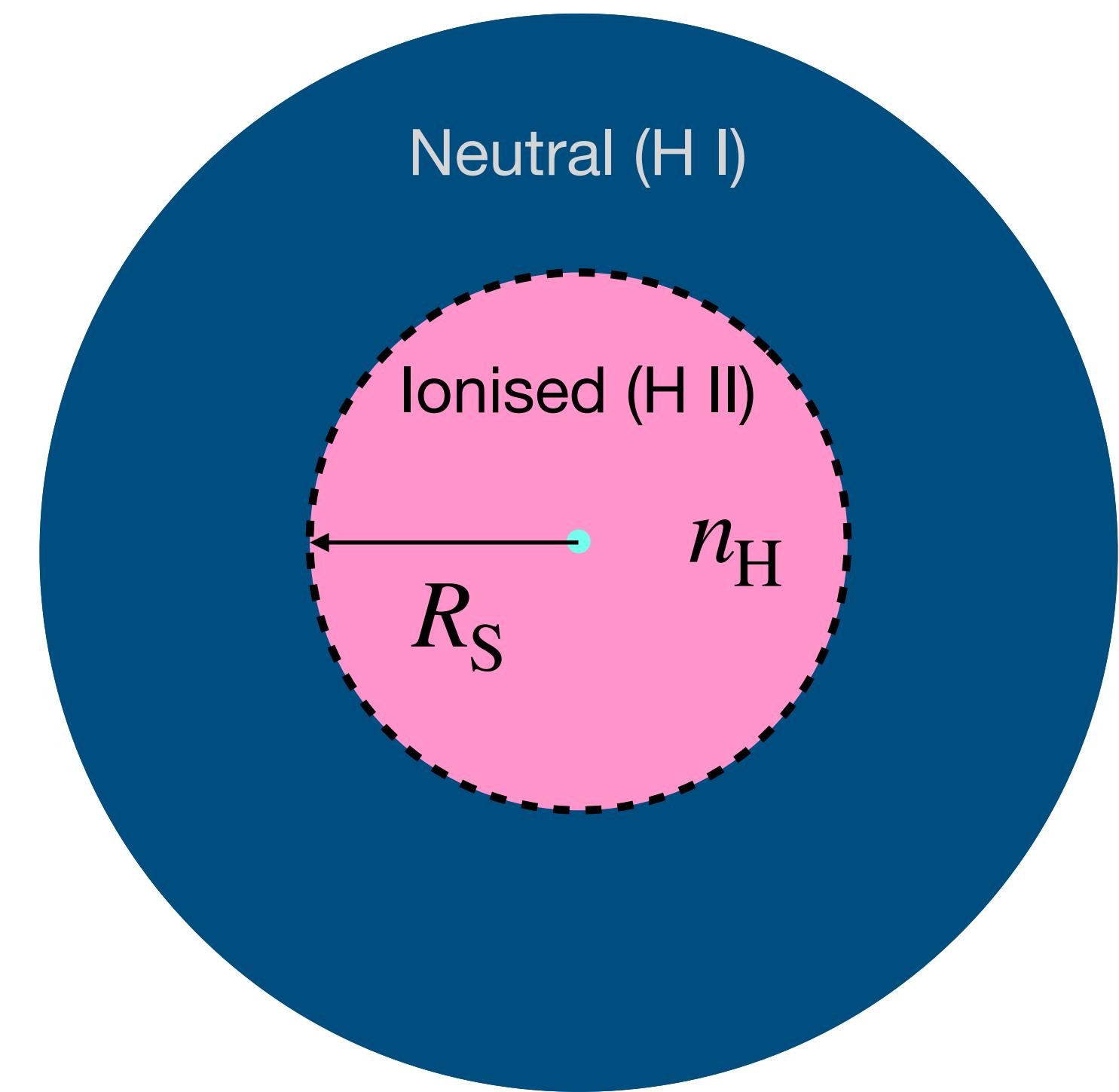
Photoionisation in H II regions

Inside a radius r defining the H II region, ionisations balance recombinations (volumetric rate $\alpha_{\text{rec}} n_{\text{HII}} n_e$):

$$\dot{N}_{\text{ion}} = \frac{4}{3} \pi r^3 \alpha_{\text{rec}} n_{\text{HII}} n_e$$

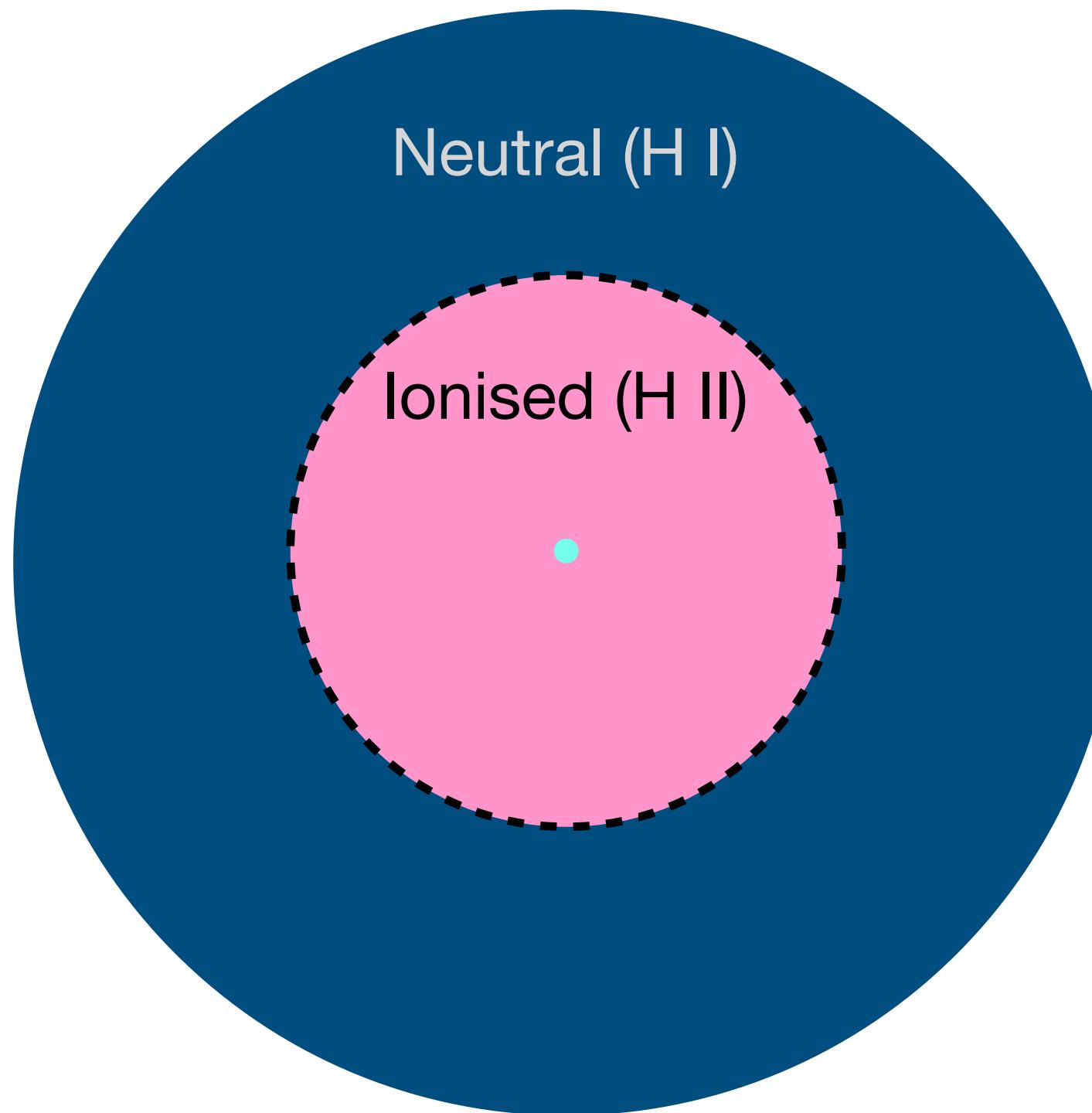
For fully ionised hydrogen ($n_{\text{HII}} n_e \approx n_{\text{H}}^2$), we can define the *Strömgren radius*:

$$R_S^3 \equiv \left(\frac{3\dot{N}_{\text{ion}}}{4\pi\alpha_{\text{rec}} n_{\text{H}}^2} \right)$$



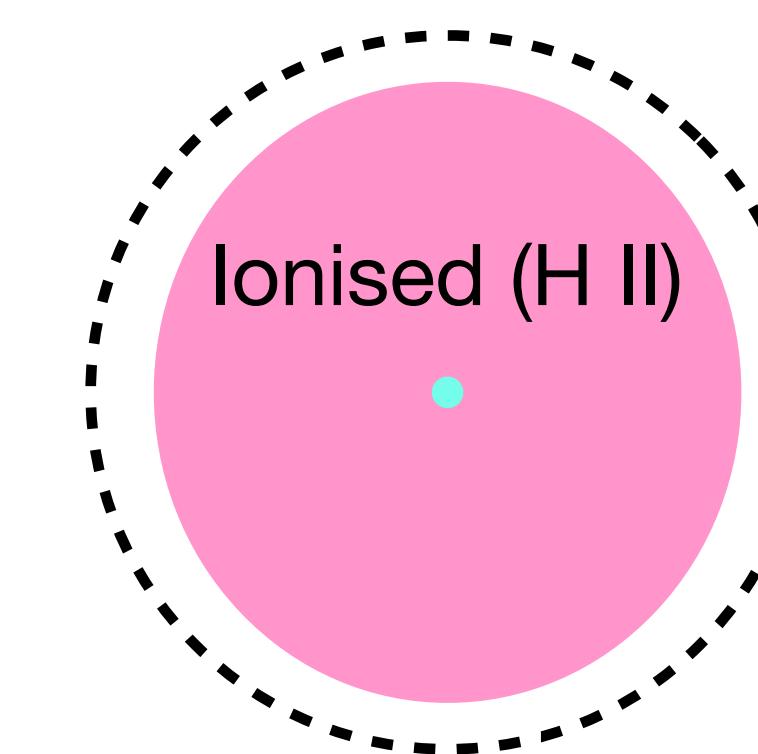
Photoionisation in H II regions

Ionisation bounded ($r > R_S$)



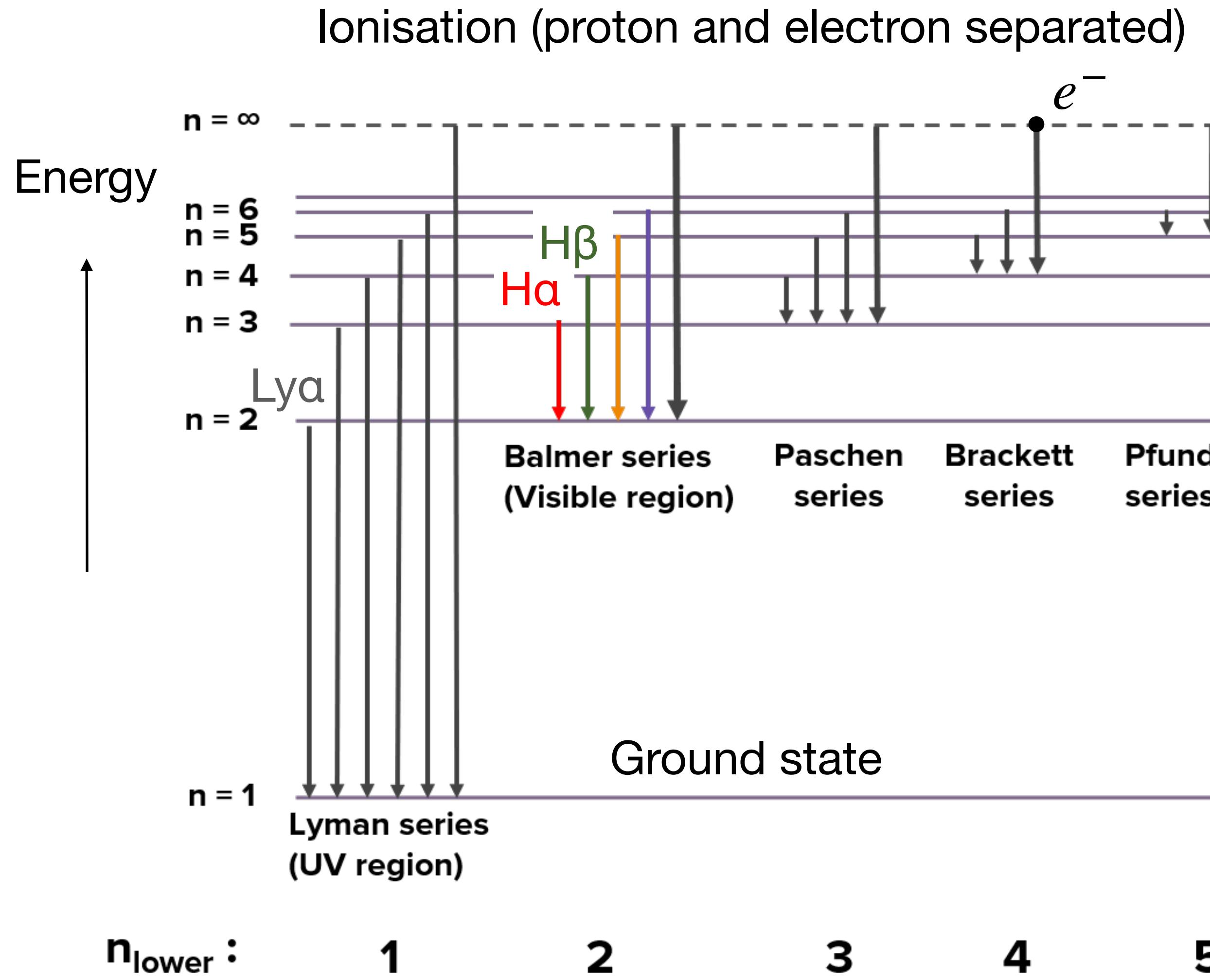
All ionising photons absorbed:
 $f_{\text{esc}} = 0$ (no reionisation!)

Density bounded ($r < R_S$)



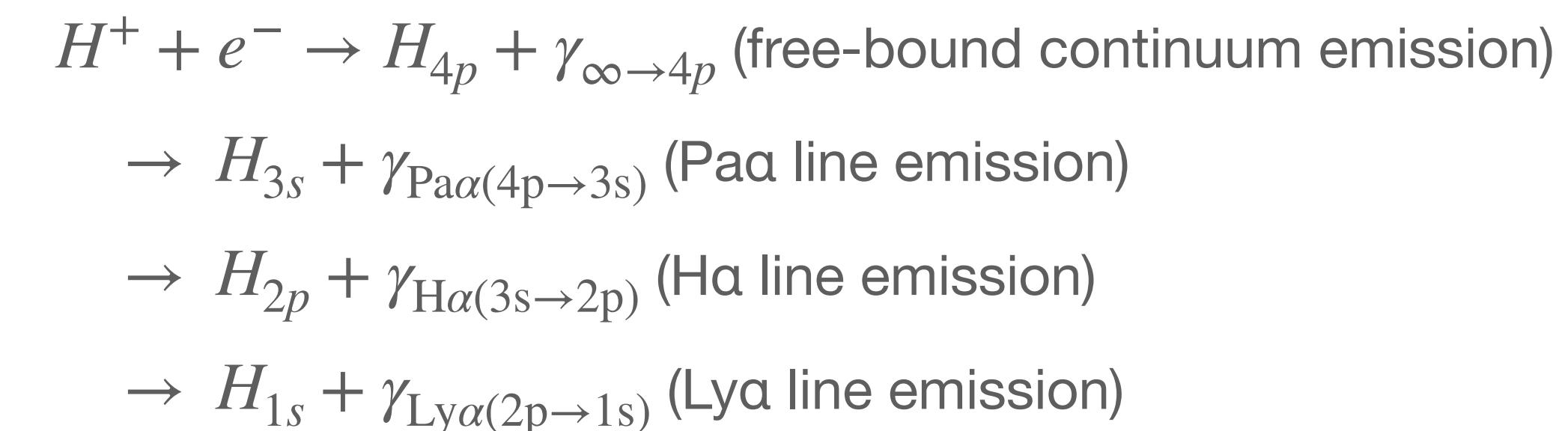
Escape of ionising photons:
 $f_{\text{esc}} > 0$

Hydrogen recombination lines



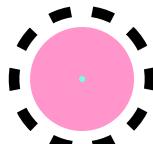
Recombination radiation

Every time a proton and electron recombine into a hydrogen atom, the electron quickly cascades down to the ground state (obeying QM selection rule $|l - l'| = 1$), for instance:

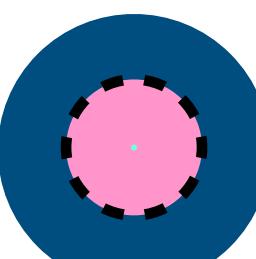


Simplifying assumptions

Case-A recombination: gas is optically thin to LyC photons (density bound), recombination can result in any energy level



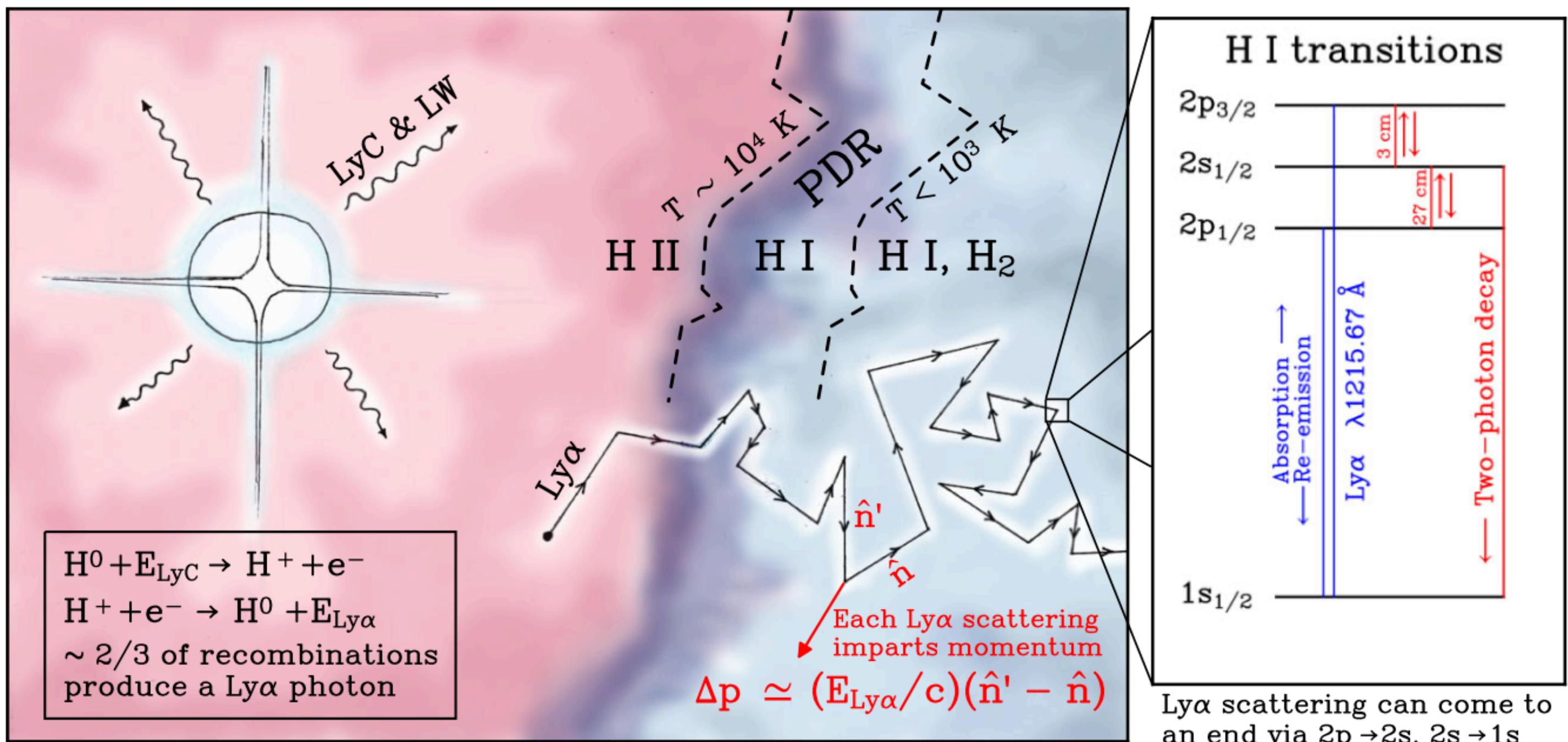
Usual assumption is Case B: gas is optically thick to Lyman-series photons (ionisation bound), recombination cannot result in the ground state (why not?)



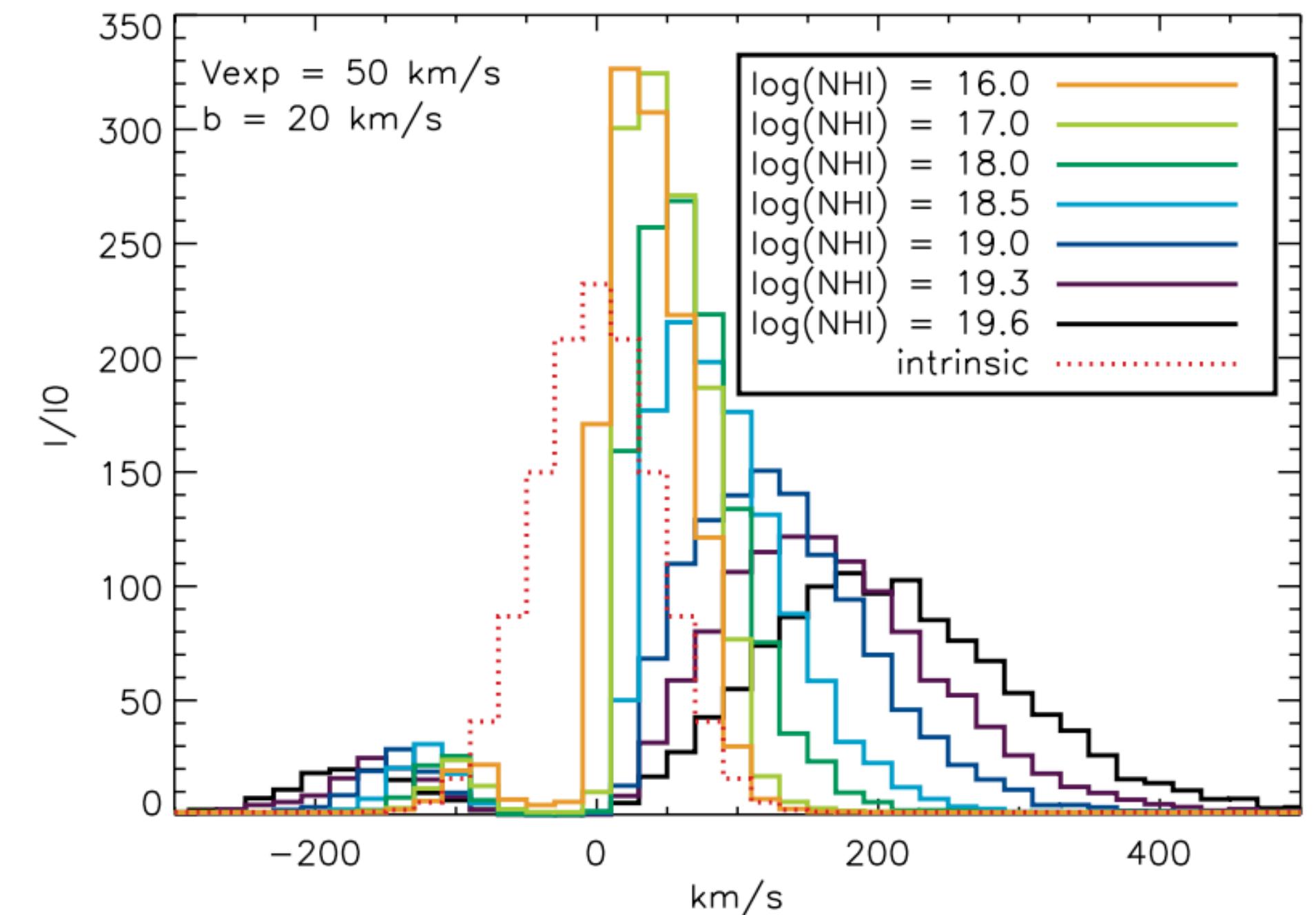
Under case B, about 2/3 of recombination events (68.6% at 10 000 K) lead to the emission of a Ly α photon. This leads to a significant fraction of stellar light (up to 40% of luminosity) to be reprocessed into Ly α photons.

Resonant scattering of Ly α photons

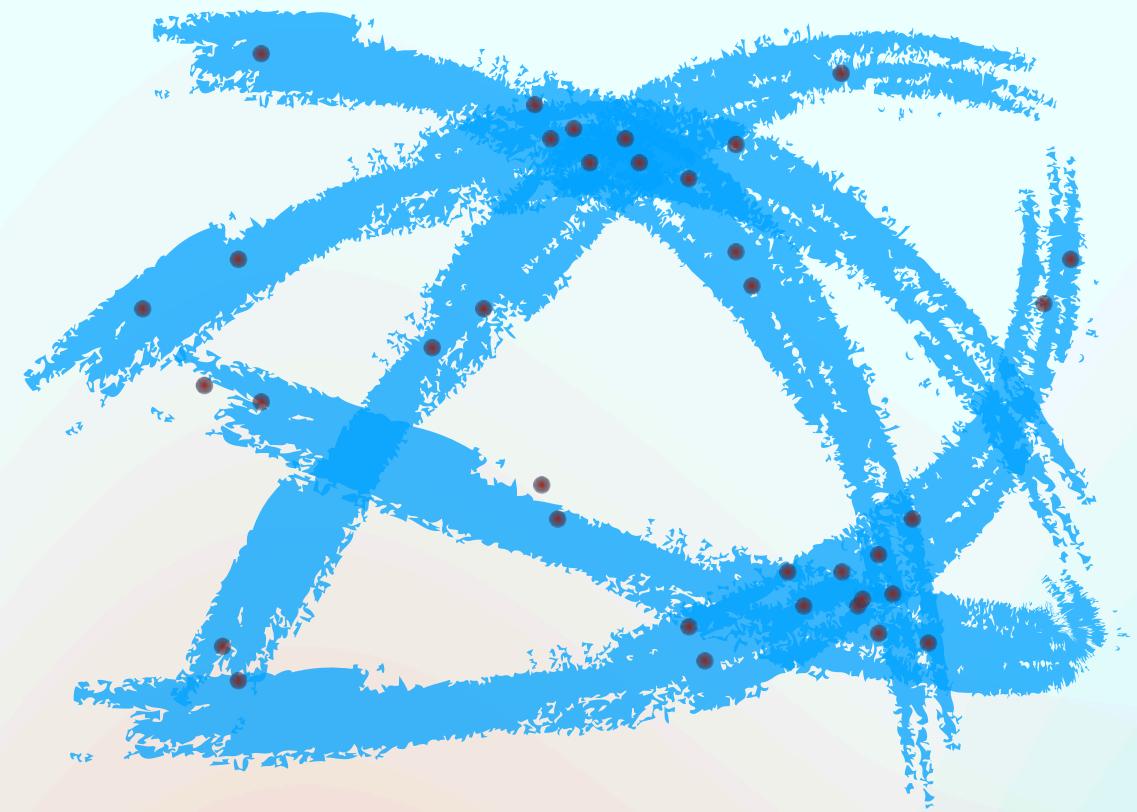
Nebrin et al. (2025)



Model with outflowing gas (Verhamme et al. 2014)

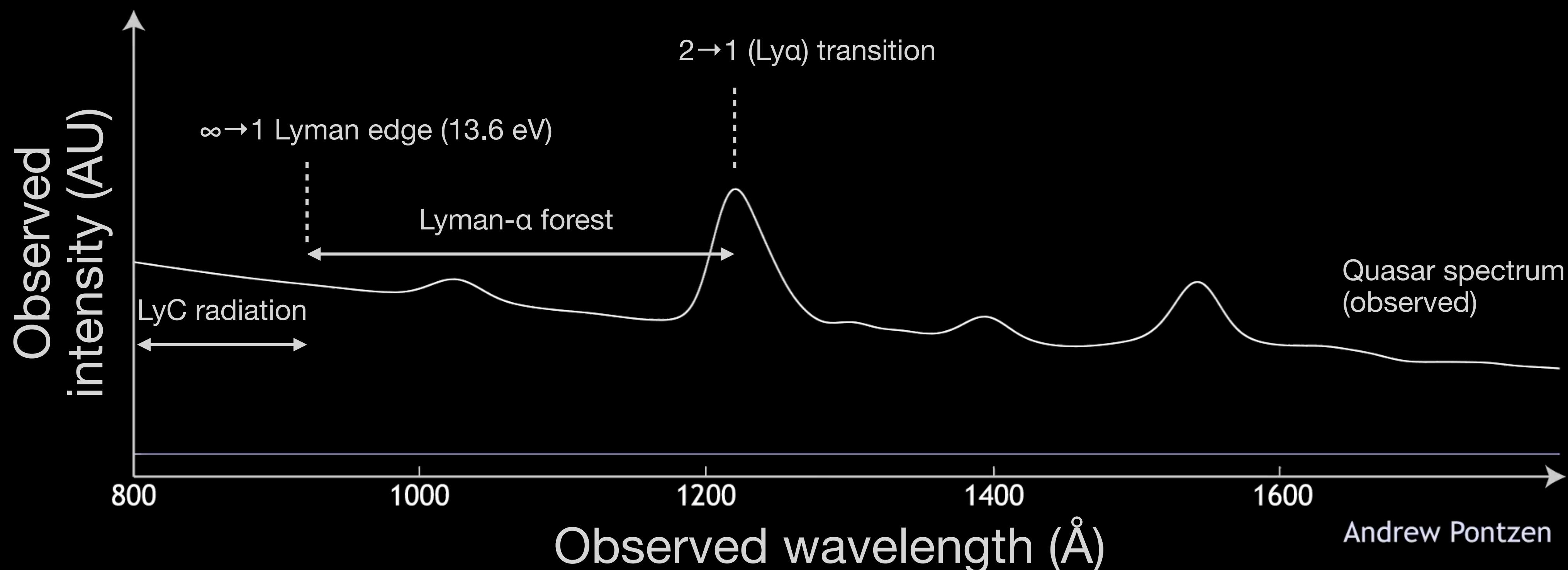


Peak shift redwards,
as ubiquitously seen
in observations:
evidence for
galactic outflows



Observationally probing the intergalactic medium

Intergalactic absorption: Lyman-a forest



IGM absorption of Lyman- α



First distance measurement of quasars (Schmidt 1963, 1964, 1965)

NOTES

ON THE DENSITY OF NEUTRAL HYDROGEN IN INTERGALACTIC SPACE

Recent spectroscopic observations by Schmidt (1965) of the quasi-stellar source 3C 9, which is reported by him to have a redshift of 2.01, and for which Lyman- α is in the visible spectrum, make possible the determination of a new very low value for the density of neutral hydrogen in intergalactic space. It is observed that the continuum of the source continues (though perhaps somewhat weakened) to the blue of Ly- α ; the line as seen on the plates has some structure but no obvious asymmetry. Consider, however, the fate of photons emitted to the blue of Ly- α . As we move away from the source along the line of sight, the source becomes redshifted to observers locally at rest in the expansion, and for one such observer, the frequency of any such photon coincides with the rest frequency of Ly- α in his frame and can be scattered by neutral hydrogen in his vicinity.

Gunn & Peterson (1965)

IGM absorption of Lyman- α

Consider a distant source with a given redshift z_s .

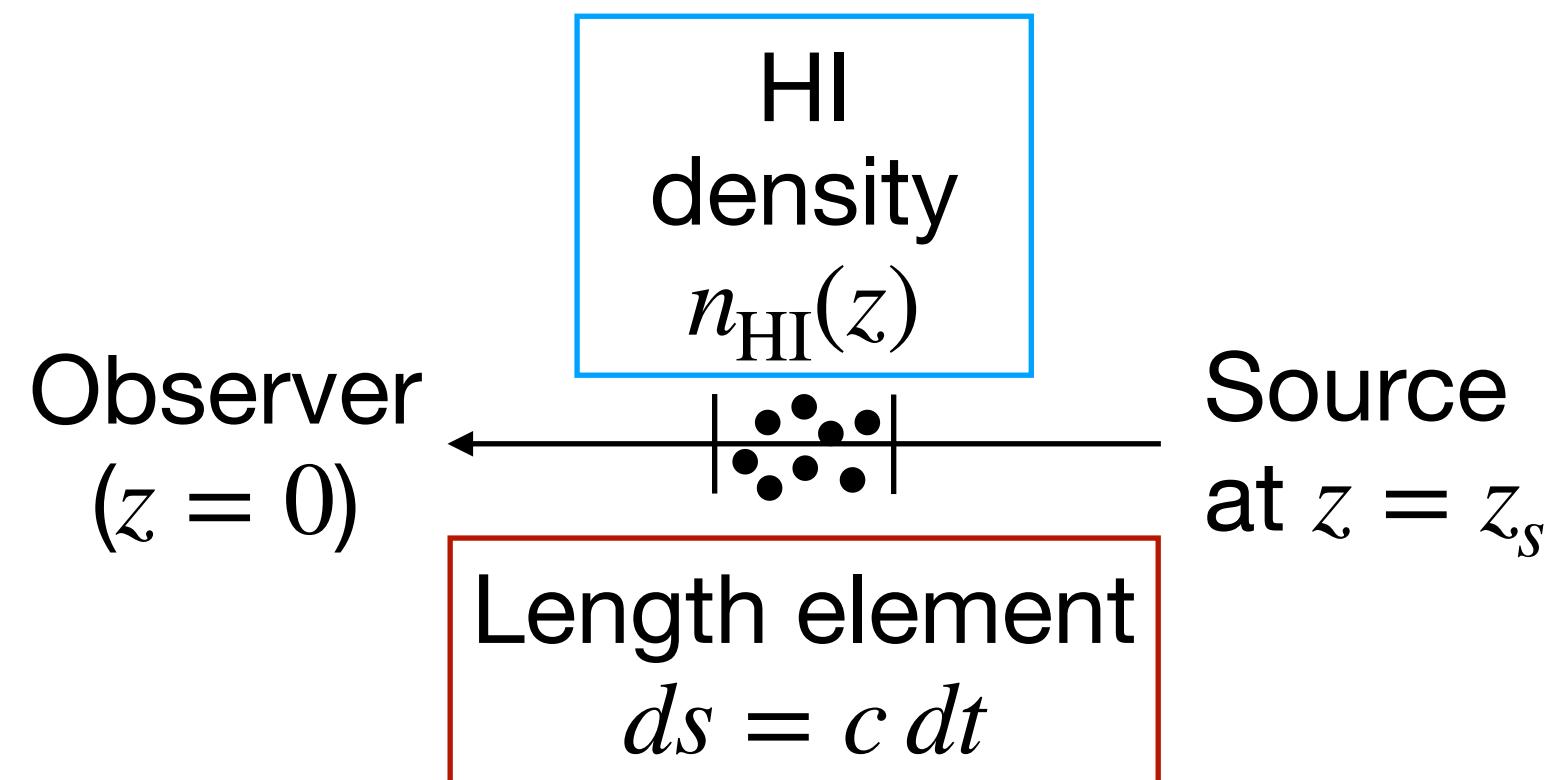
Given the Ly α cross section $\sigma_{\text{Ly}\alpha}(\lambda, T) \approx 5.9 \times 10^{-14} \phi(\lambda) \left(\frac{T}{10^4 \text{ K}} \right)^{-1/2} \text{ cm}^2$, the integrated optical depth to Ly α photons from a source at redshift z_s is

$$\tau_{\text{Ly}\alpha}(\lambda_{\text{obs}}) = \int_0^{z_s} dz \frac{c dt}{dz} n_{\text{HI}}(z) \sigma_{\text{Ly}\alpha} \left(\frac{\lambda_{\text{obs}}}{1+z}, T \right).$$

Approximating $\phi(\lambda)$ to be a delta function at $\lambda = \lambda_{\text{Ly}\alpha}$ for simplicity, we obtain the Gunn-Peterson optical depth for the IGM at neutral fraction x_{HI} and overdensity $\Delta = n_{\text{H}}/\bar{n}_{\text{H}}(z)$:

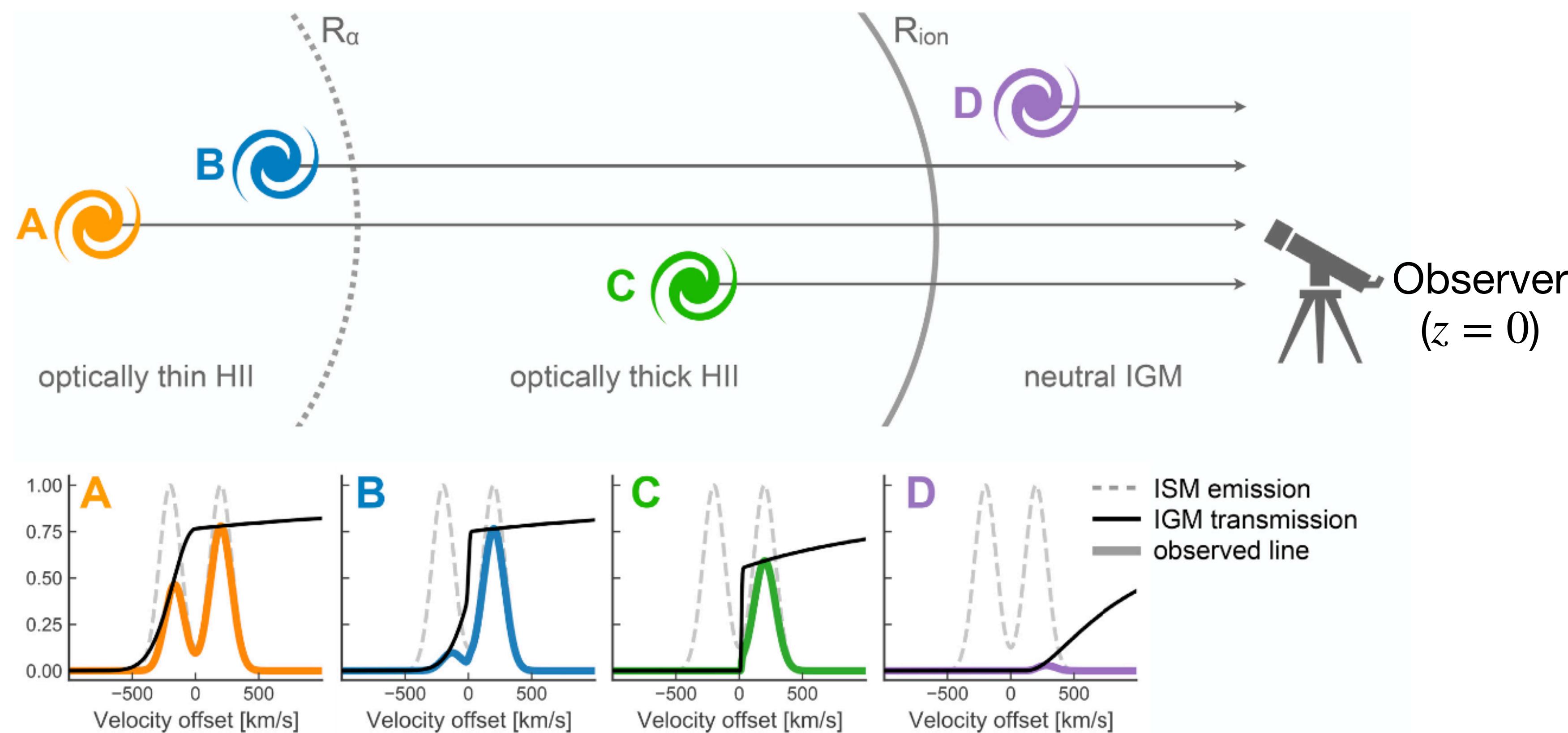
$$\tau_{\text{GP}}(z_s) = \frac{f_\alpha \pi e^2}{m_e \nu_\alpha} \frac{x_{\text{HI}} n_{\text{H}}(z_s)}{H(z_s)} \approx 2.1 \times 10^4 x_{\text{HI}} \Delta (1 + z_s)^{3/2}.$$

As soon as the neutral fraction of a intervening medium at mean density ($\Delta = 1$) exceeds $x_{\text{HI}} \approx 10^{-4}$, it becomes optically thick to Ly α !



Ionised bubbles and Lyman-a escape

Two-zone IGM model: ionised bubble embedded in neutral medium (Mason & Gronke 2020)



Impact on observing Lyman-a emitting galaxies (LAEs)

Reionisation
is driven by...

Low-mass
galaxies

High-mass
galaxies

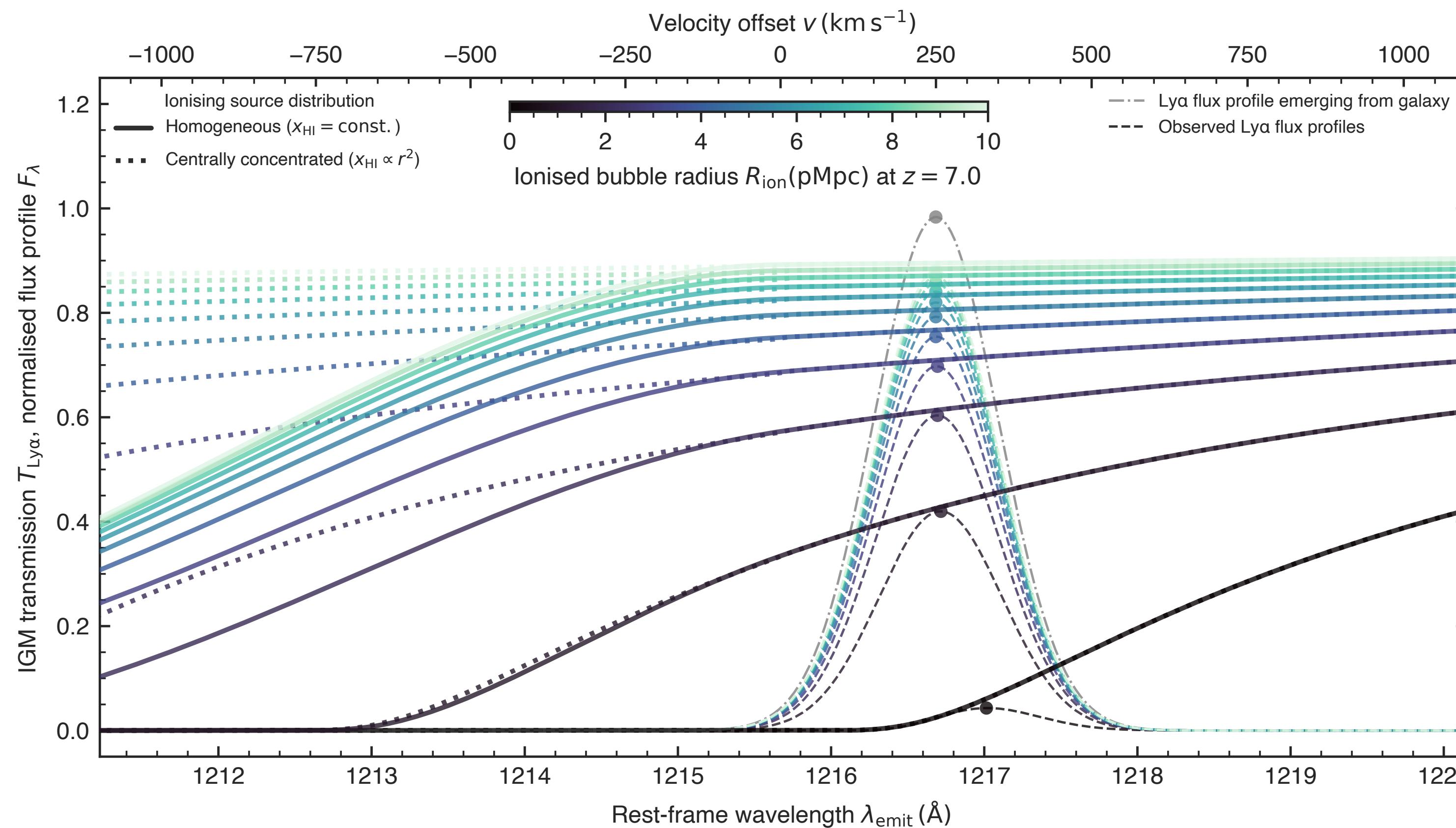


LAEs directly trace the
process of reionisation!

Cosmic time

Astraeus simulations
(Hutter et al. 2023)

Connecting bubble size with Ly α transmission



From case-B recombination theory, we can predict the intrinsic Ly α strength from the Balmer lines (H α , H β): way to estimate R_{ion} !

Ionised bubble in an expanding universe

How does the volume of a sphere ($V \propto R^3$) evolve with time, if its radius stays constant in comoving coordinates, $R(t) = a(t)\chi$ with $\chi(t) = \text{const.}$?

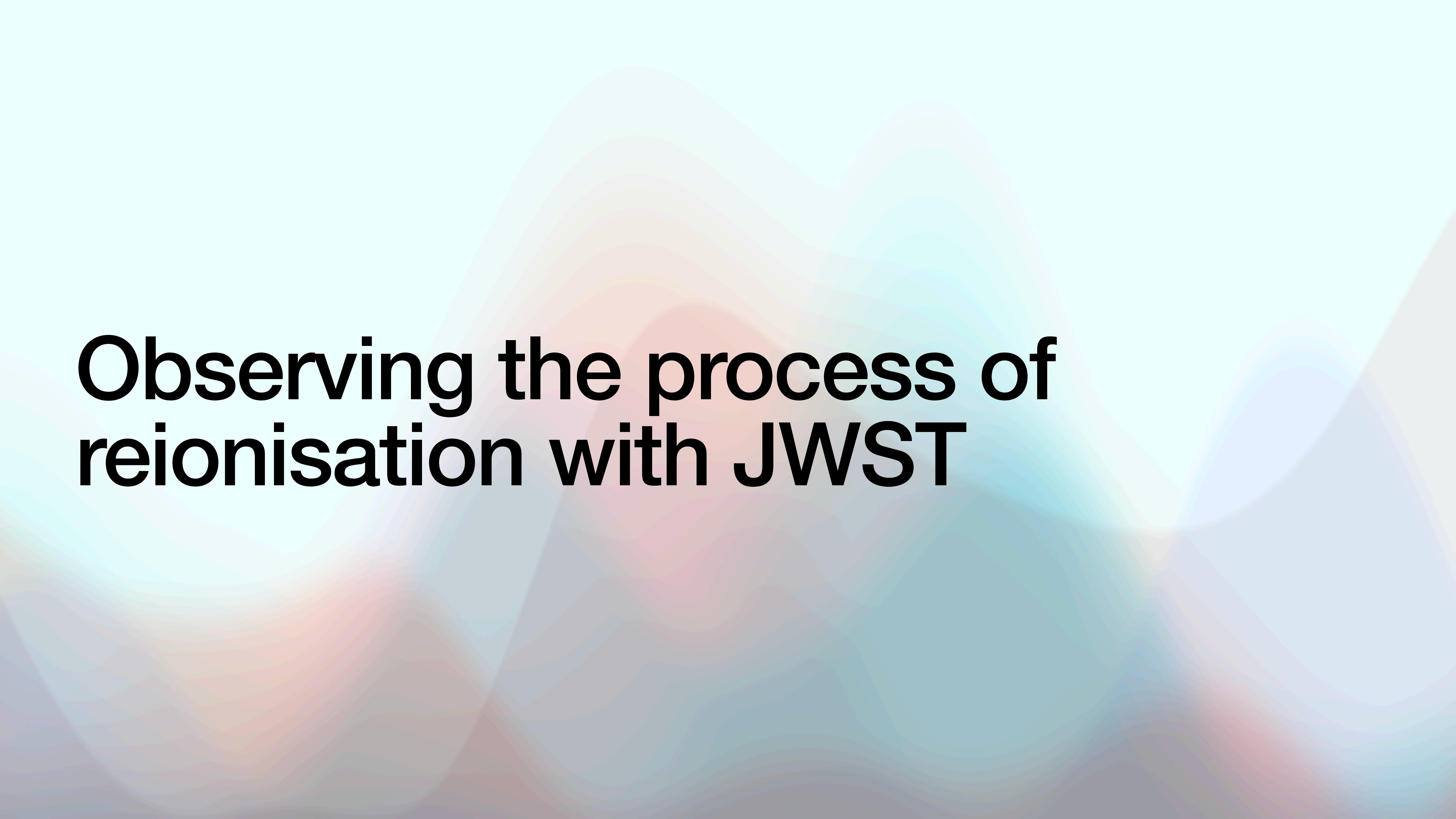
Chain rule: $\frac{d(R^3)}{dt} = 3R^2 \frac{dR}{dt} = 3R^2 \frac{da}{dt} \chi = 3R^3 \frac{\dot{a}}{a}$

Evolution of ionised bubble radius $R_{\text{ion}}(t)$ given by Cen & Haiman (2000):

$$\frac{dR_{\text{ion}}^3}{dt} = \boxed{3H(z)R_{\text{ion}}^3} + \boxed{\frac{3f_{\text{esc, LyC}} \dot{N}_{\text{ion}}}{4\pi \bar{n}_{\text{H}}}} - \boxed{C_{\text{HII}} \bar{n}_{\text{H}} \alpha_{\text{B}} R_{\text{ion}}^3}$$

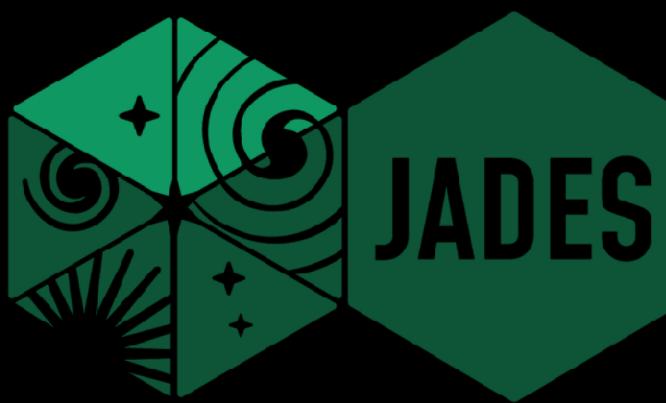
Cosmic expansion Escape of ionising photons

Recombinations, with
'clumping factor' based
on simulations ($C_{\text{HII}} = 3$)



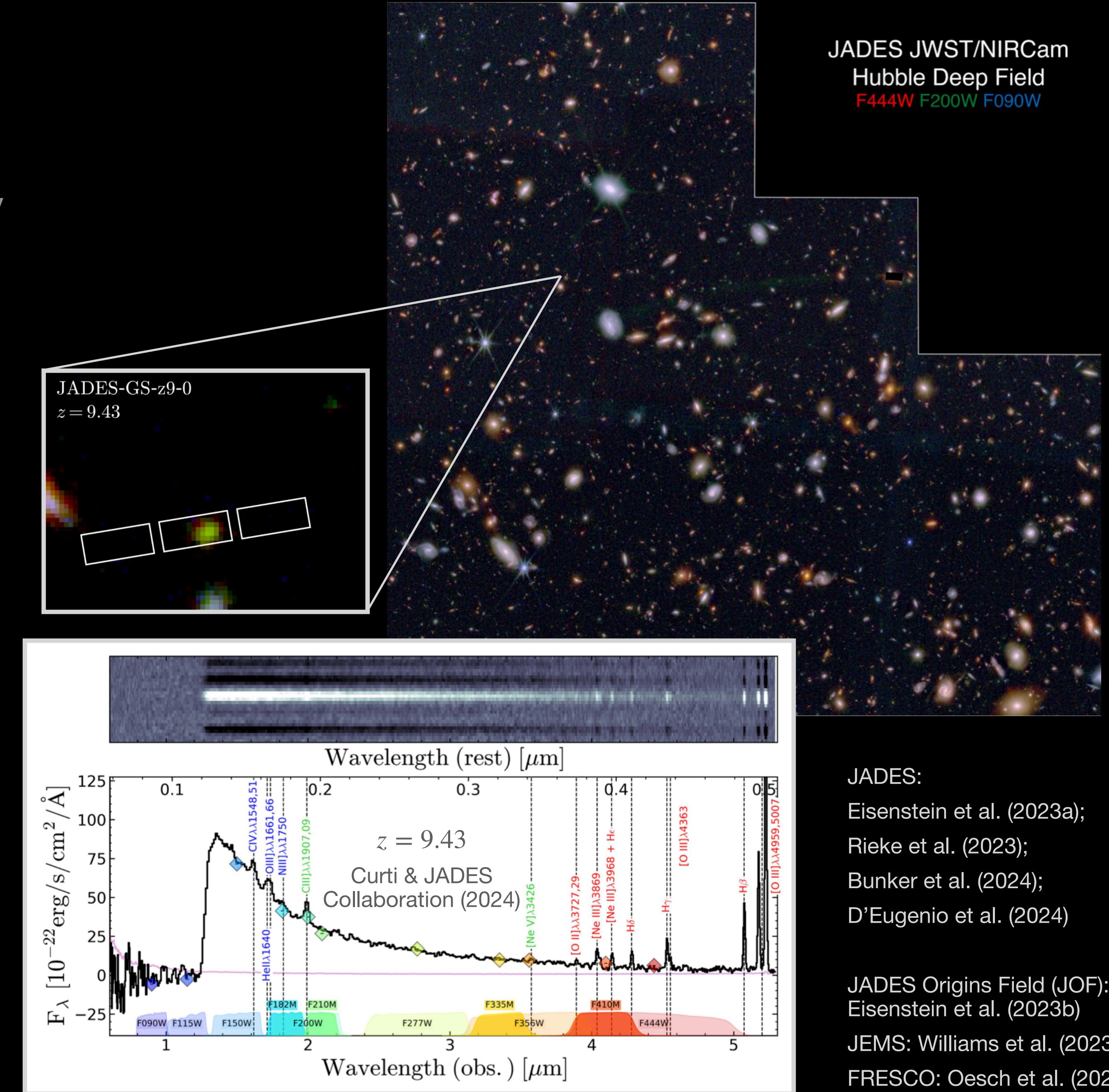
Observing the process of reionisation with JWST

JADES



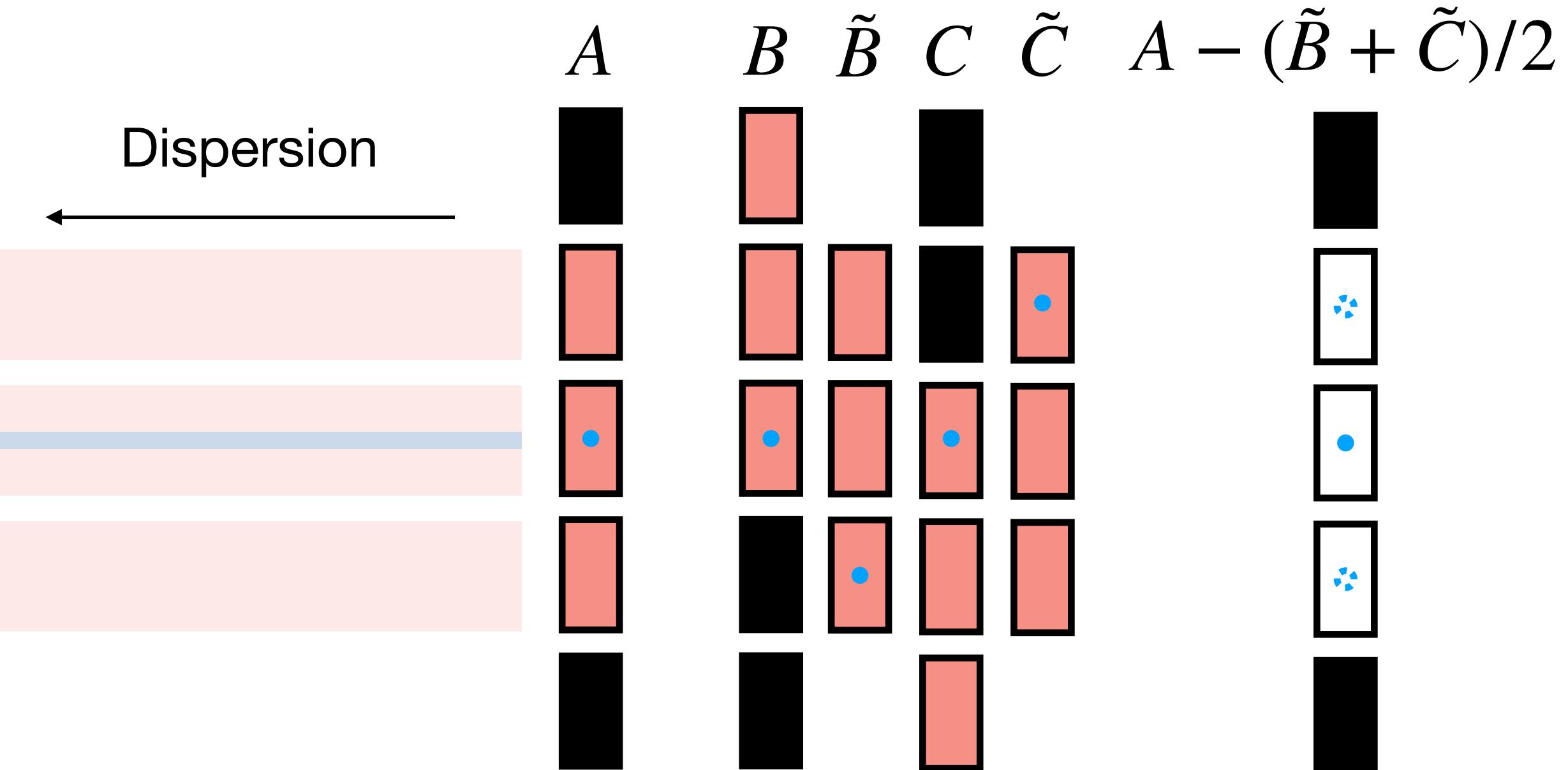
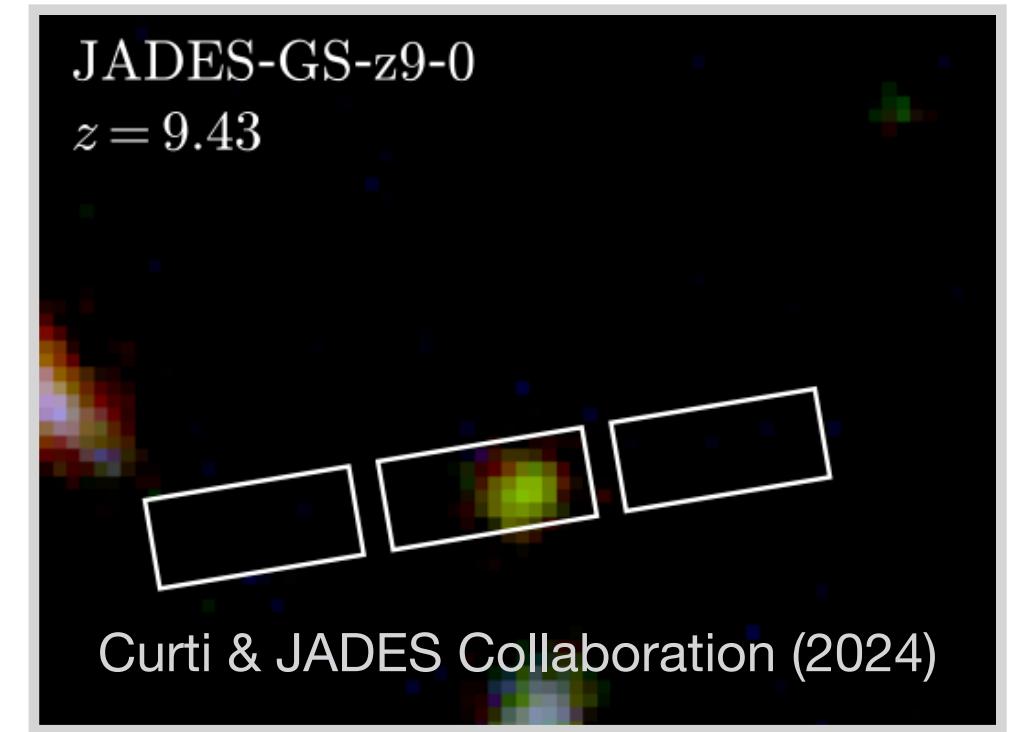
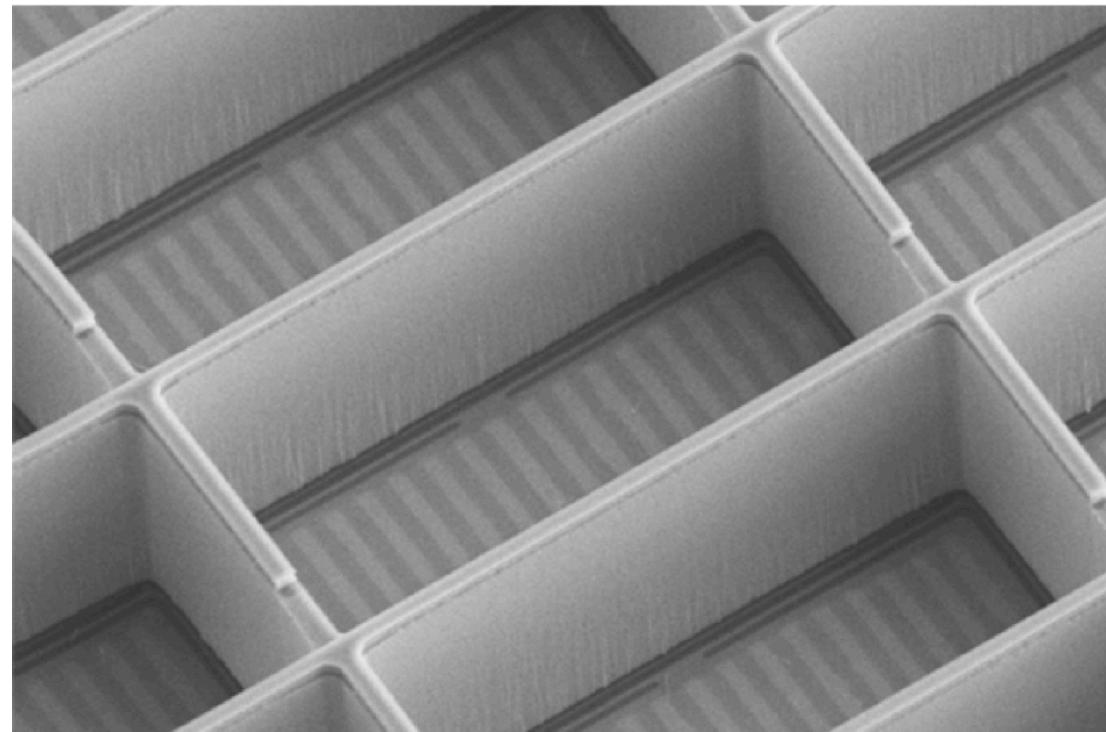
JWST Advanced Deep Extragalactic Survey

- Joint GTO programme from NIRCam & NIRSpec instrument teams: <https://jades-survey.github.io>
- Near-infrared multi-object spectroscopy selected from ultra-deep pre-imaging over the GOODS fields, containing HUDF
- Exposure times of 10 up to 100+ hours (!) per target over different resolution modes, mainly PRISM ($R \approx 100$) and gratings ($R \approx 1000$)



NIRSpec multi-object spectroscopy

- 250,000 configurable micro-shutters that can be individually opened or closed form the *micro-shutter assembly* (MSA)
- Light is dispersed onto detector from three adjacent micro-shutters
- Observations are taken in three different positions or *nods*
- Nodding pattern allows local background subtraction



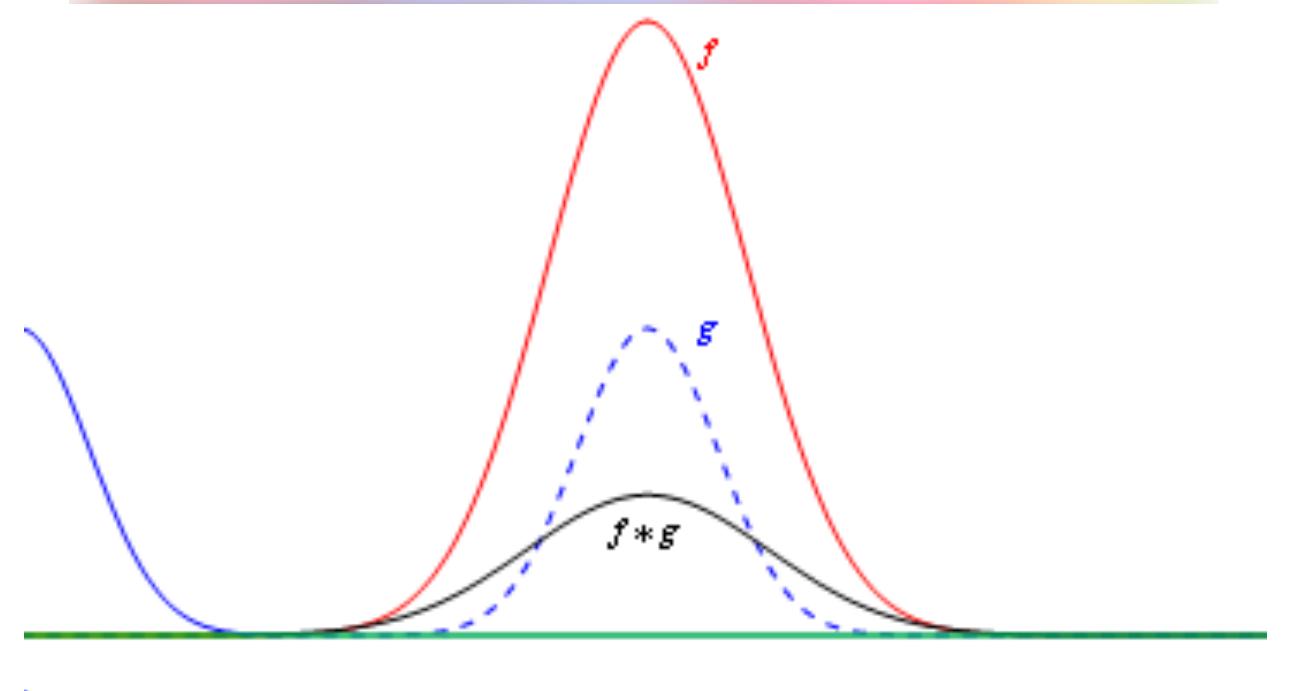
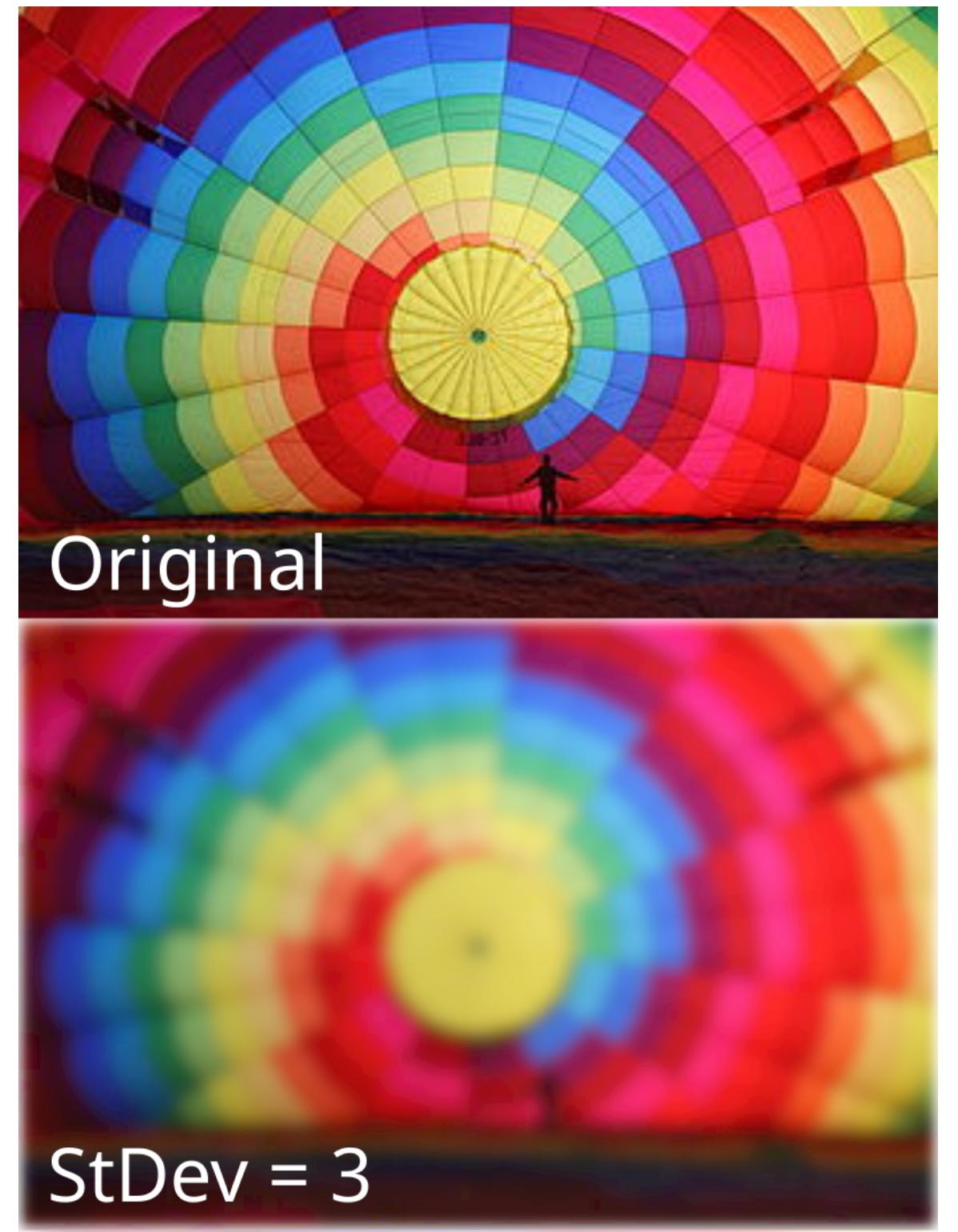
Spectral resolution

- Equivalent to the *point spread function* (PSF) in images, in spectroscopy we have the *line spread function* (LSF): the observed profile of a delta function ('point source')
- The observed spectrum (F_λ) is then simply a convolution of the LSF and the intrinsic spectrum ($F_{\lambda, \text{intr}}$):

$$F_\lambda = \text{LSF} * F_{\lambda, \text{intr}}$$

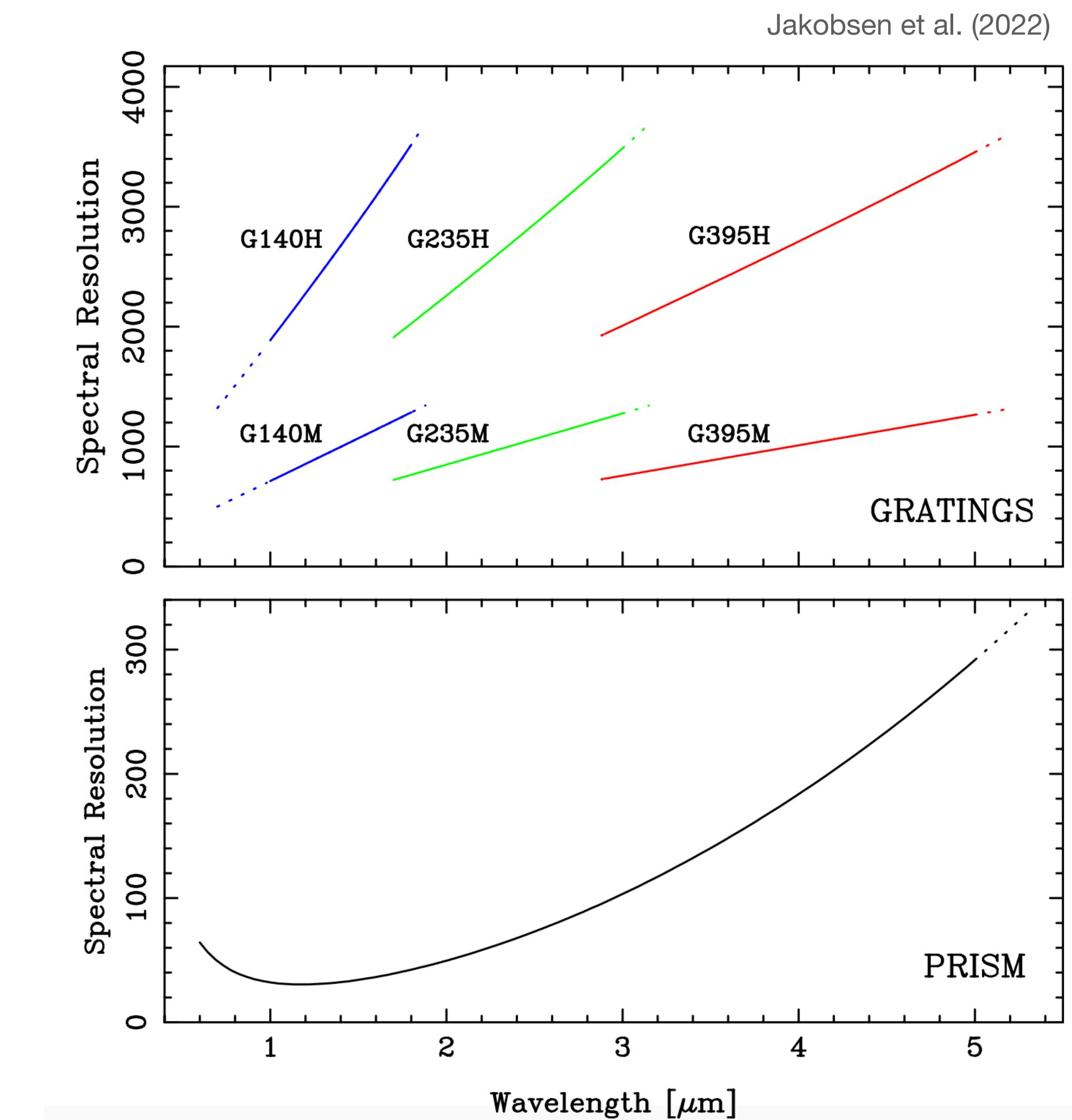
- Both intrinsic line profile and LSF often assumed to be Gaussian, in which case their widths add quadratically (because their Fourier Transforms are still Gaussian):

$$\sigma_{\text{obs}}^2 = \sigma_{\text{int}}^2 + \sigma_{\text{LSF}}^2$$

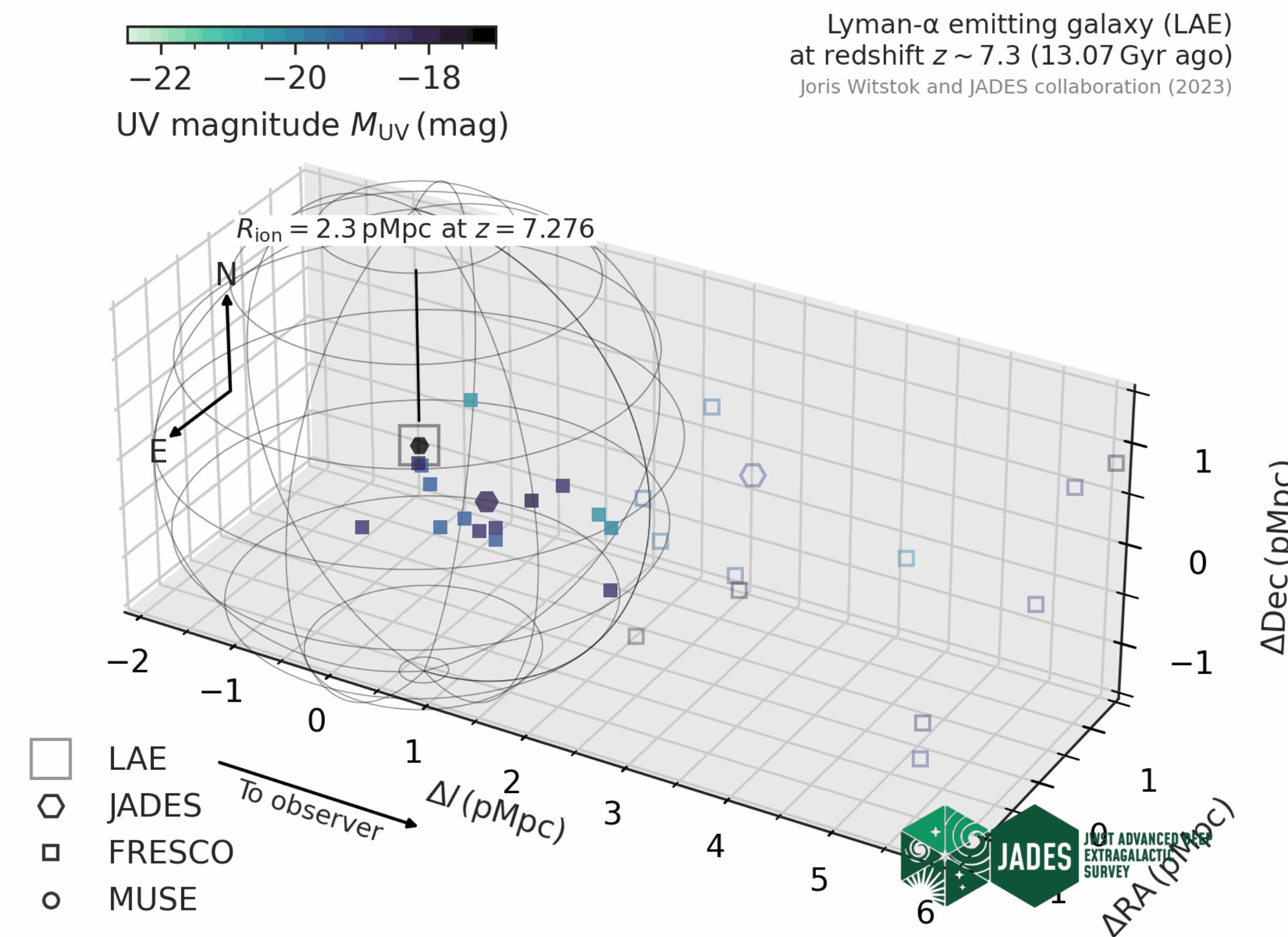


NIRSpec dispersers and filters

- Spectral resolution $R = \lambda/\Delta\lambda$ specifies the FWHM $\Delta\lambda$ of line spread function (LSF)
- NIRSpec instrument has 7 modes:
 - One low-resolution PRISM disperser ($R \approx 100$) covering 0.6-5.3 μm
 - Three medium-resolution gratings ($R \approx 1000$) together covering 1-5 μm
 - Three ‘high-resolution’ gratings ($R \approx 3000$) together covering 1-5 μm



Example: JWST view of LAE within an ionised bubble



Summary

- The study of galaxy evolution spans a huge dynamic range of physical scales
- Spectroscopy is a powerful tool to understand the astrophysical conditions in and around galaxies
- Reionisation exemplifies the complex interplay between galaxies and the large-scale matter distribution (IGM)

