Lecciones en Astrofisica Avanzada (Semester 1 2025)

Mapping the Universe with Variable Stars (I)

Nina Hernitschek
Centro de Astronomía CITEVA
Universidad de Antofagasta

April 21, 2025

Student Presentation

topic: **Variable stars**

your task:

- select each a paper from the topic "Variable stars"
- present it at the beginning of the third class (Friday) in a 10 minute presentation
- the first slide will contain your name and presentation title
- the last slide will contain the references used

Motivation

Although the Greeks considered *the heavens* as unchanging, careful observers have known otherwise:

Hipparchos observed a new star in Scorpius in 134 BC, which inspired him to create the **first stellar catalog** so that new stars could more easily be recognised in the future.

Motivation

What are variable stars?

A star is a variable star if we can measure its brightness changing over time.

There are many **types** of variable stars, regarding how those brightness changes are caused by things happening inside, on the surface of, or around that star.

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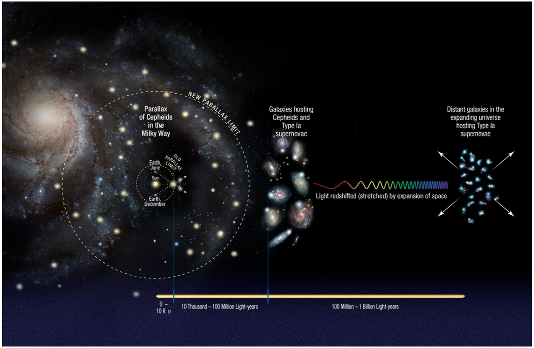
From supernovae to stars with exoplanets, variable stars are of high interest in astronomical research.

Motivation

Research on variable stars **provides information about stellar properties**, such as mass, radius, luminosity, temperature, internal and external structure, composition, and evolution.

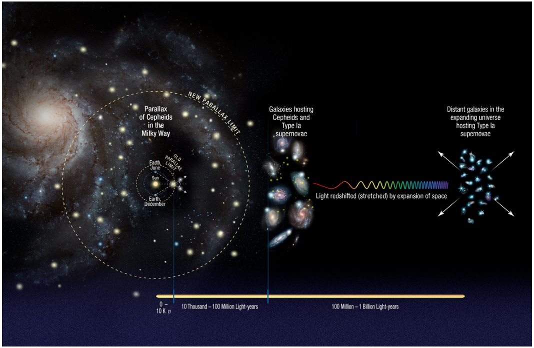


Motivation

Mapping the Universe with Variable Stars (I)

Research on variable stars **provides information about stellar properties**, such as mass, radius, luminosity, temperature, internal and external structure, composition, and evolution.

In addition, variable stars provide **distance information** (keyword: *distance ladder*) in our galactic neighborhood.



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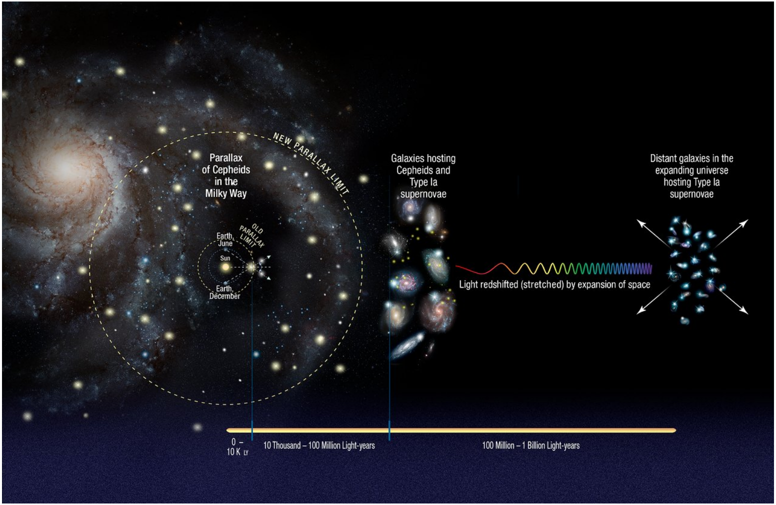
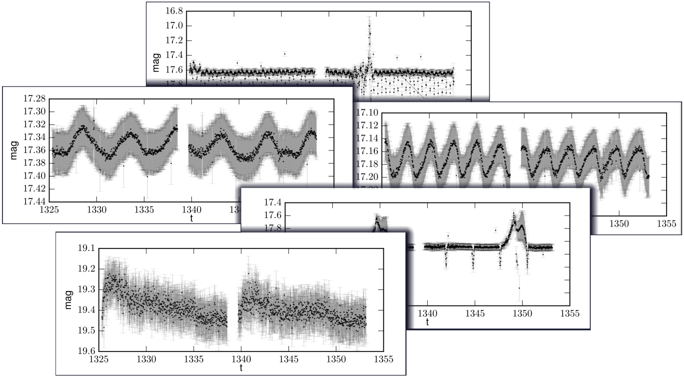


Credit: NASA, ESA, A. Feild (STScI), and A. Riess (STScI/JHU)

Variable Stars

Variable stars are stars showing a change in brightness.



A selection of variable star light curves from the TESS survey.

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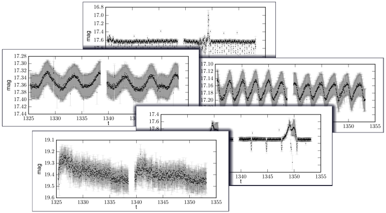

few parts per million ← **change in luminosity** → factor 1000

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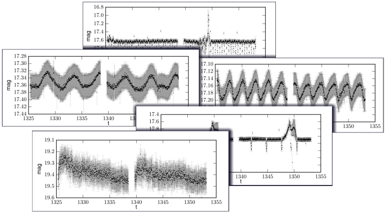

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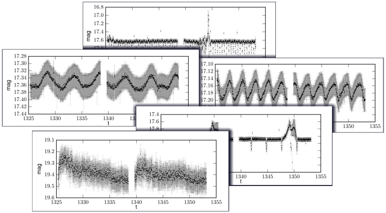

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periodic — **signal shape** — aperiodic/ random

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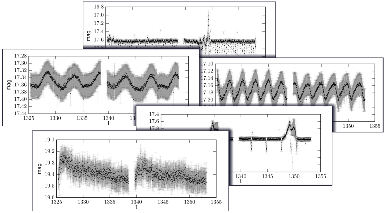

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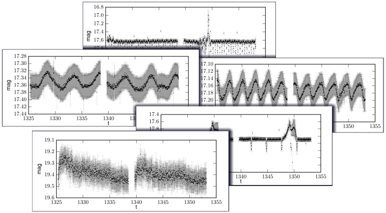

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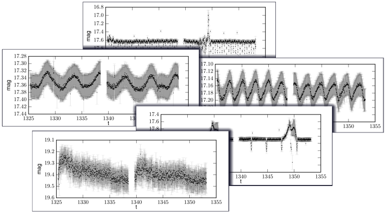

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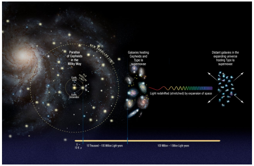


and our universe in general

Variable Stars

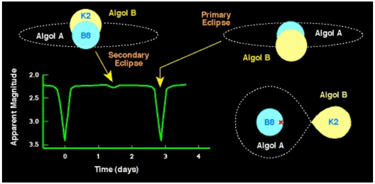
Variable stars are stars showing a change in brightness.

Intrinsic Variables

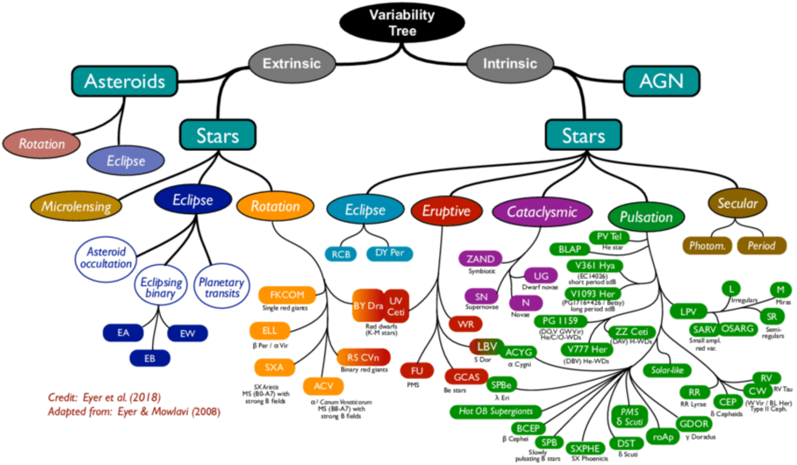
Stars whose energy output actually varies (pulsating stars, erupting or explosive stars)

Extrinsic Variables

Stars that only appear to vary due to geometric/ external effects (eclipses in binary systems, etc.)



Variability Tree



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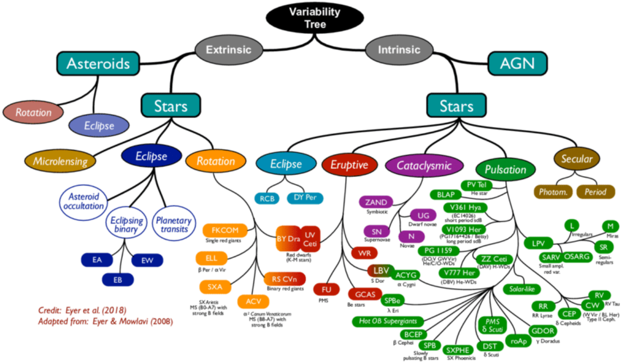


Credit: Eyer et al. (2018)
Adapted from: Eyer & Mowlavi (2008)

many astronomical sources vary - describe, classify and select astronomical sources by their variability

Discovery of Variable Stars

historically: discovered sporadically

A tortoise-shell inscription from China from 1400 BC reads:

On the Jisi day, the 7th day of the month, a big new star appeared in the company of the Ho star.

On the Xinwei day the new star dwindled.

185: a "guest star" was observed by Chinese astronomers

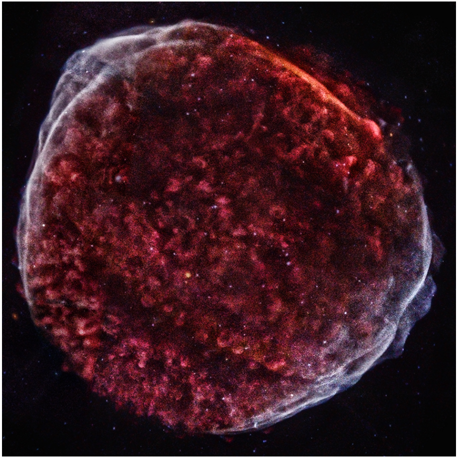
1006: supernova described by Egyptian astronomer Ali bin Ridwan

This spectacle appeared in the Scorpio... The magnitude of its brightness was a little more than a quarter of the brightness of the moon.

The star reached magnitude about -7.5, visible during daylight for some time, an remained visible for more than a year. The brightest supernova observed?

Discovery of Variable Stars

The supernova remnant from SN 1006 as seen by Chandra in X-ray; the remnant is now 70 light years across.



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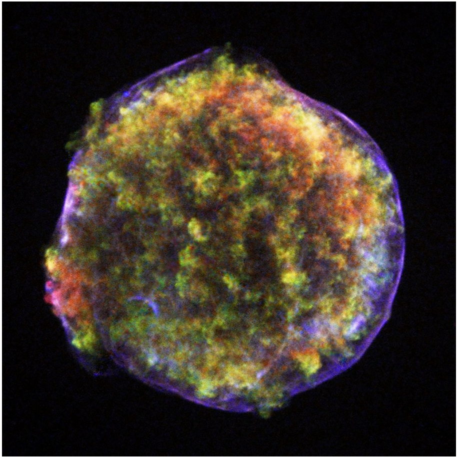
1572: Tycho’s supernova

It reached magnitude -4, and remained visible in daylight for two weeks. Tycho Brahe wrote a book about it, *De Nova Stella* (On the new star).

Discovery of Variable Stars

The supernova remnant from SN 1572 (Tycho's Supernova) as seen by Chandra in X-ray.



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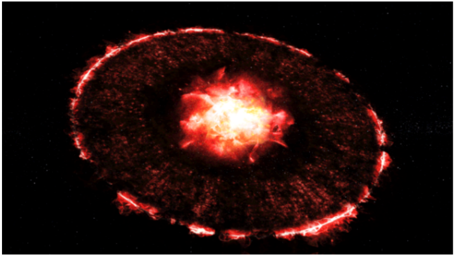
1604: Johannes Kepler’s supernova

Discovery of Variable Stars

Nowadays, we distinguish between a **supernova explosion** (a catastrophic event involving the destruction of the star), and a **nova explosion** (a cataclysmic event).

We now believe the historical *new stars* were all supernovae.

White dwarfs above the Chandrasekhar mass cannot longer resist gravity. If a white dwarf accretes enough matter to push it over the Chandrasekhar limit, it will collapse, followed by an explosion.

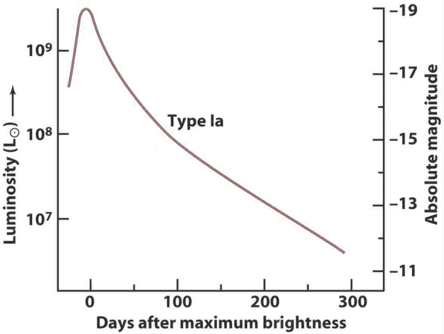


An artist's illustration of cosmic dust in the blast waves from SN 1987A. (Image credit: NASA/SOFIA)

Discovery of Variable Stars

These supernovae - thermonuclear or Type Ia supernovae - have no hydrogen in their spectra at all.

They are so luminous that we can see them more than halfway across the universe. Because they all have very similar brightness, they are very important beacons for **measuring the distances*** to very distant galaxies.



* more on this later on

Discovery of Variable Stars

There is a group of stars which change their brightness in a regular manner: **periodic variable stars**

historically: they were much harder to detect

1596: David Fabricius noted that the star o Ceti (now known as Mira) was sometimes visible, sometimes not

1638: Johannes Holwarda found a visibility cycle of 11 months for Mira

1700s: William Herschel discovered the variability of α Herculis and 44i Bootis

1850s: $\sim$18 periodic variable stars known

1890: establishment of the Variable Star Section of the British Astronomical Association (BAAVSS)

1911: founding of the American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO)

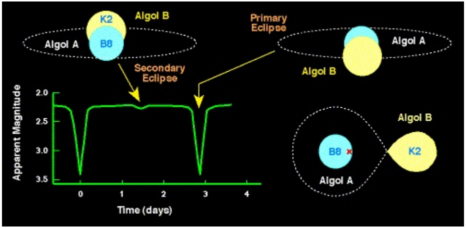
Discovery of Periodic Variable Stars

causes of variability?

John Goodricke and Edward Pigott: proposed the theory that Algol's variability might be caused by eclipses of the star by a planetary companion

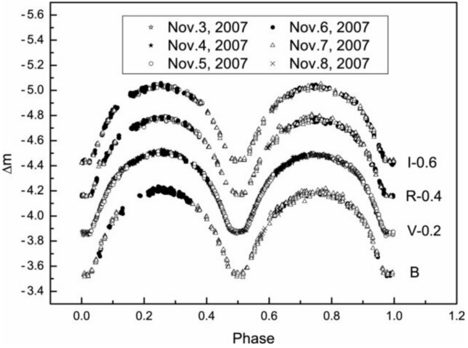
we know today:

Algol is a three-star system, consisting of β Persei (Per) A, β Per B and β Per C. They regularly pass in front of each other, causing eclipses. This is an **eclipsing binary star**. The condition for this to happen is that the plane of the binary is (almost) edge-on to us.



Discovery of Periodic Variable Stars

Sometimes the two stars are so close that their outer atmospheres merge: these are known as **contact binaries**.



The light curve of the contact binary AE Phoenicis. The fact that there is no part of the orbit where the light curve is flat shows that the stars are never separate but are actually in contact. Credit: He at al. (2009)

(Early) Classification of Variable Stars

systematic observation of variable stars reveiled **differences in their light curves**

Pigott (1780s): variable stars: nova, long-period variables, short-period variables

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Pickering (1880s): a more detailed scheme:

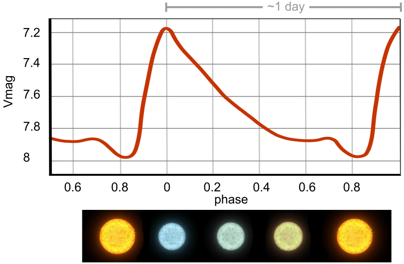
- (Ia) normal novae: now known to be nearby ones in our own galaxy;
- (Ib) novae in nebulae: now known to be supernovae in other galaxies;
- (IIa) long-period variables: cool, large-amplitude pulsating variables;
- (IIb) U Geminorum stars: dwarf novae;
- (IIc) R Coronae Borealis stars: stars which suddenly and unpredictably decline in brightness;
- (III) irregular variables: a motley collection;
- (IVa) short-period variables such as Cepheids and RR Lyrae stars;
- (IVb) Beta Lyrae type eclipsing variables; and
- (V) Algol type eclipsing variables.

Pulsating Variable Stars

underlying physics of variability:

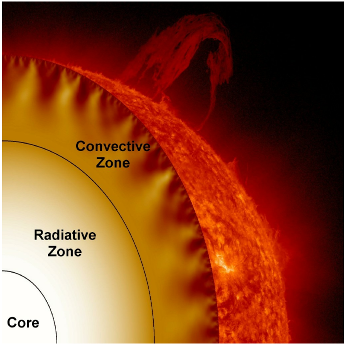
idea: (at least some) periodic variability might be caused by pulsations (A. Ritter 1873)

Observational studies by Harlow Shapley and others around 1915, and the concurrent theoretical studies by Eddington, established the pulsational nature of the Cepheids, cluster type variables (RR Lyrae stars), and long-period variables.



Cause of Pulsation

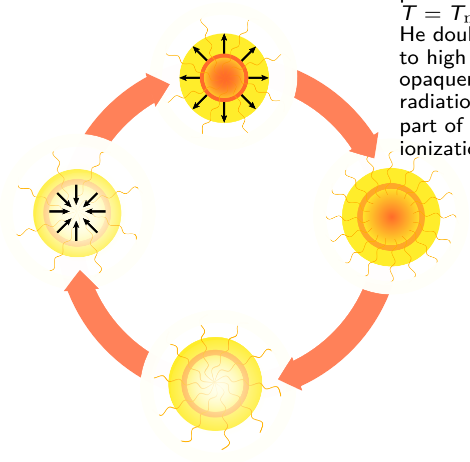
Energy from a stellar core - regardless if it is a pulsating star or not - cannot reach the surface directly: instead it is transported by **radiation**, where atoms absorb and then re-emit photons; or by **convection**, where hot material rises and colder material sinks, just like a boiling pot.



credit: NASA/ Marshall Solar Physics

Cause of Pulsation

cause of pulsation: Lack of hydrostatic equilibrium beneath the surface drives the pulsation cycle with expansion and contraction of the outer layers of a star and subsequent change in brightness:



point of greatest compression: $T = T_{\max}$
He doubly ionized (HeIII) due to high T
opaqueness of HeIII causes radiation absorption (dimmest part of cycle) $\Rightarrow$ increase of ionization, T and pressure.

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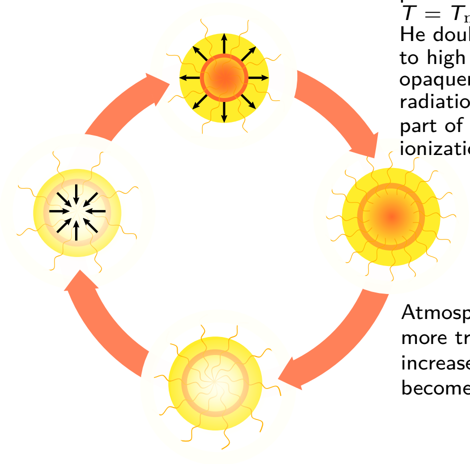

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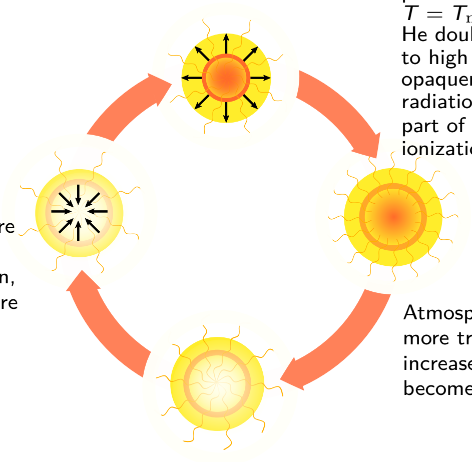

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Atmosphere falls back, contraction, temperature rises.

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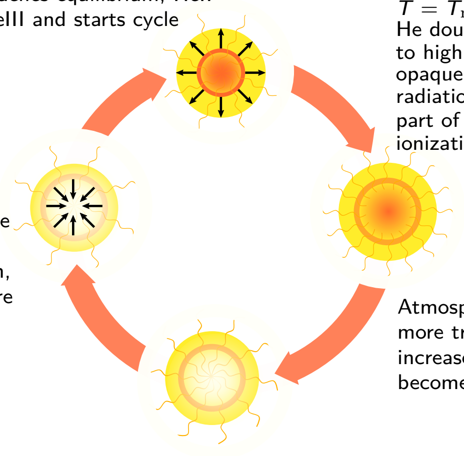
Atmosphere falls back, contraction, temperature rises.

Before it reaches equilibrium, HeII becomes HeIII and starts cycle over again.



Cause of Pulsation

This is called **radial mode** pulsation. It is found in large-amplitude pulsating variables in the HR-diagram *instability strip*: Cepheids, Miras and RR Lyrae stars.

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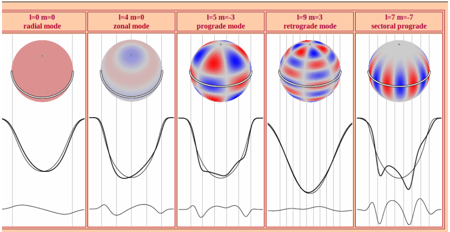
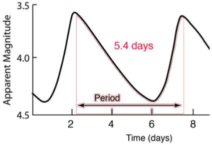
There are stars whose pulsation is **non-radial**: a star changes shape, but not volume. Non-radial pulsation leads to smaller amplitudes of variation. Some stars – β Cephei, δ Scuti stars and to a small amount also RR Lyrae stars – pulsate in both radial and non-radial modes.



models of stars with non-radial pulsations (copyright Coen Schrijvers) http://staff.not.iac.es/ jht/science/

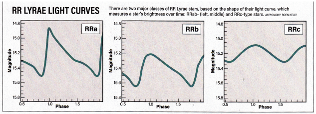
Types of Pulsating Variable Stars

we are looking for **bright, strictly periodic*** stars
*caveat: this condition cannot always be met



Cepheids

- brightness enables us to observe them in other galaxies in our Local Group (such as the Magellanic Clouds, M31 and M33)
- period-luminosity relation makes them important standard candles ⇒ distance ladder



RR Lyrae stars

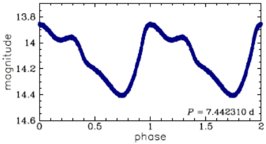
- numerous in the Milky Way halo (globular clusters), thus once called *cluster variables*
- less bright than Cepheids
- period-luminosity relation and their age makes them important tracers of the old Milky Way halo substructure

Cepheids

Classical (Type I) Cepheids

bright yellow, highly luminous, supergiant pulsating variables

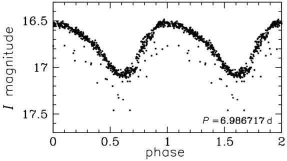
- amplitudes: ∼0.01 - 2 mag_V
- periods: 1 - 135 days
- variability is strictly regular
- spectral type: F at maximum light, G to K at minimum light; the longer the period, the later the spectral type



Population II (Type II) Cepheids

similar light curve than Type I, but different evolutional history

- older, low mass stars
- important fossils of the first generation of stars in our galaxy



Soszyński et al. (2018), OGLE data

RR Lyrae stars

prototype: RR Lyrae (variability discovered by Williamina Fleming, $\sim$ 1900); RR Lyrae stars are old helium-burning variable stars of spectral type A5 to F5 with 0.5 $M_\odot$

RRab
asymmetrical light curves with steep ascend

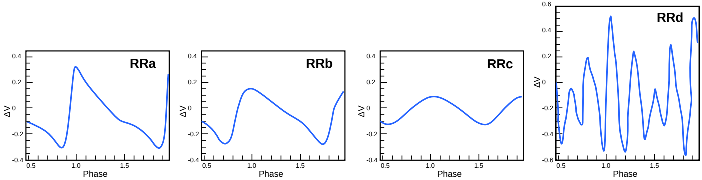
- periods: 0.3 - 1.2 days
- amplitudes: 0.5 - 2 mag_V

RRc
nearly symmetrical light curves

- periods: 0.2 - 0.5 days
- amplitudes: < 0.8 mag_V

RRd
double-mode RR Lyrae stars, fundamental and first overtone

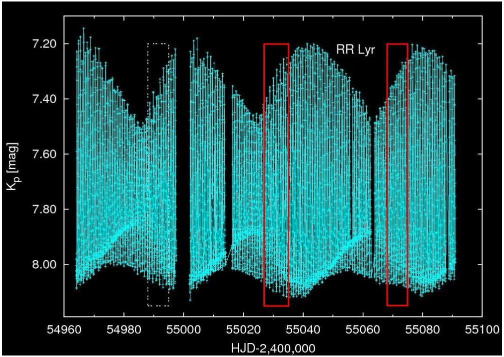
- fundamental period: 0.5 days
- period ratio: 0.74 days



RR Lyrae stars

discovery by Harlow Shapley and Richard Prager (1916) independently:

RR Lyrae (the prototype's) light curve is modulated in amplitude and shape



observation of a RR Lyrae star with Blazhko effect from the Kepler survey

RR Lyrae stars

⇒ period-amplitude-shape modulation is today known as the **Blazhko effect**
its explanation remains one of the enduring mysteries in astrophysics to this day

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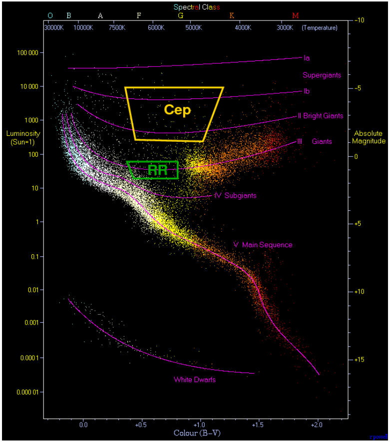
two promising **theories** for explaining the Blazhko effect:

(i) resonance between the radial fundamental period of pulsation, and a non-radial period; or

(ii) a deformation or splitting of the radial period by a magnetic field in the star

Evolutionary Stages - the Hertzsprung-Russel (H-R) Diagram

early 20th century: E. Hertzsprung and H. N. Russell noted that a scatter plot of a measure of stellar **luminosity** (absolute magnitude) vs. a measure of the stellar **temperature** (spectral type, color) shows structure:



An observational Hertzsprung-Russell diagram with 22,000 stars from the Hipparcos Catalogue and 1,000 from the Gliese Catalogue of nearby stars.

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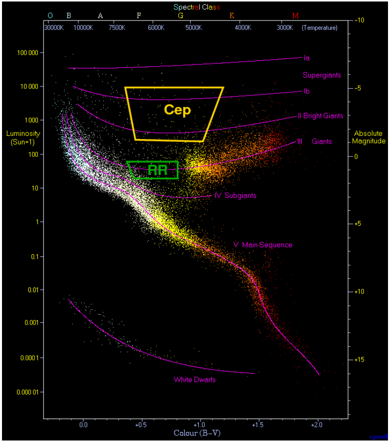

main sequence: a band extending from hot, high-luminosity stars to cool, low-luminosity stars, containing the vast majority of stars; Hydrogen fusion (H burning, H $\rightarrow$ He) in the core; the longest evolution stage

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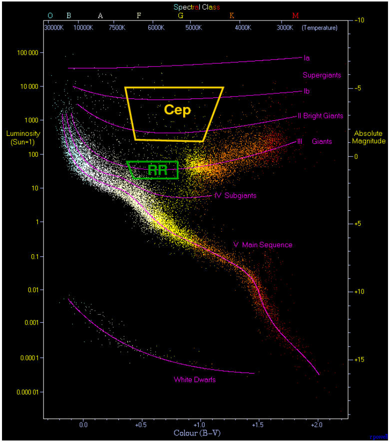

giants: After $\sim 10\%$ of the mass of a $M < M_{\odot}$ star has been converted from H to He, the star expands: it becomes a red giant with a helium core and a hydrogen buring shell. The star heats up and moves along the horizontal branch in the H-R diagram, then cools off as the core burning stops. The once again red star then goes to higher luminosity on the asymptotic giant brach (AGB). Finally it ejects its envelope and becomes a planetary nebulae containing a white dwarf ($M \leq 1.4 M_{\odot}$, $R \sim R_{\mathrm{earth}}$).

Evolutionary Stages - the Hertzsprung-Russel (H-R) Diagram

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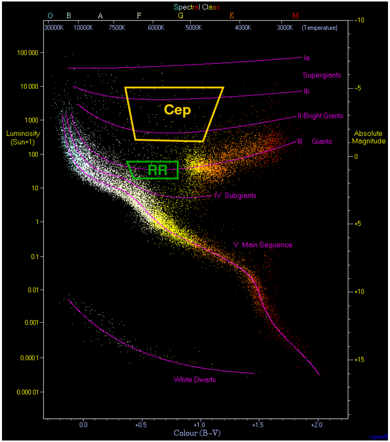
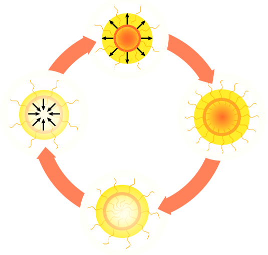


instability strip:

Stars, such as RR Lyrae stars and Cepheids, that have evolved off the main sequence and pulsate due to He III (doubly ionized helium).



Pulsating Stars as Distance Estimators

The **distance modulus** equation alone is not enough:

$$d = 10^{(m - M + 5)/5} \text{ parsec}$$

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?

Pulsating stars are a powerful tool for determining distances in astronomy, because the period of pulsation is correlated with the luminosity of the star, and this relation can be calibrated

⇒ the **period-luminosity(-metallicity) relation**

Pulsating Stars as Distance Estimators

The best-known relation between period and absolute magnitude is the direct proportionality law for **Classical Cepheid variables** (Henrietta Swan Leavitt (1908)).

foundation for scaling **galactic and extragalactic distances**

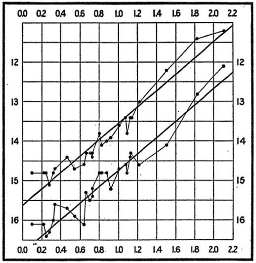


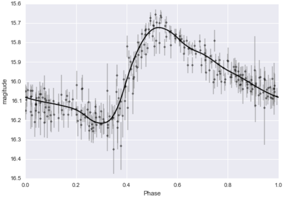
FIG. 2.

Plot from Leavitt's 1912 paper. The horizontal axis is the logarithm of the Cepheid's period, and the vertical axis is its apparent magnitude.

Pulsating Stars as Distance Estimators

Cepheid and RR Lyrae stars are variable stars with the period being directly related to their true (absolute) brightness.

basic concept:



- measure apparent mean brightness m
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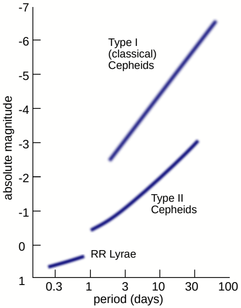

- measure apparent mean brightness m
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- using **period-luminosity relation**, get absolute brightness M
- solve for distance using **distance modulus** equation $d = 10^{(m-M+5)}/5$ parsec where 1 parsec $= 3.086^{16}$ m $= 3.26156$ lyr

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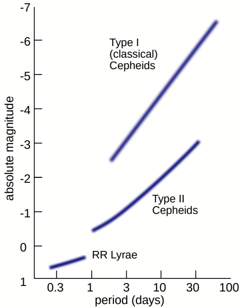

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$\Rightarrow$ allow us to create *3D maps* of structures within and beyond our Milky Way

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

Globular clusters have only little depth - we can treat all the stars in a cluster as being at $\sim$ the same distance from Earth

color-magnitude diagram of stars in a globular cluster (M3):

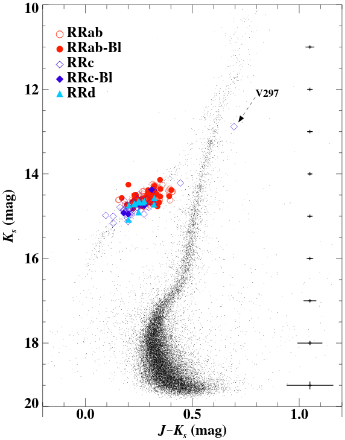

Figure 3 taken from Bhardwaj et al., AJ 160, 220 (2020)

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

Globular clusters have only little depth - we can treat all the stars in a cluster as being at ∼ the same distance from Earth

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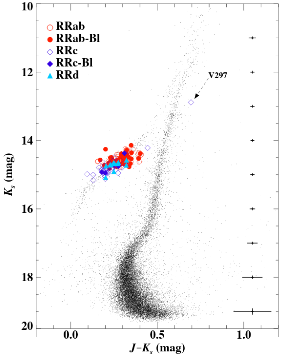

all RR Lyrae stars have ∼ the same apparent magnitude

⇒ as the distance must be ∼ the same, they also have the same absolute magnitude

if we know the absolute magnitude, we can compute the distance to each star from the distance modulus

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

A closer look:

for each RR Lyrae star in the cluster, plot the apparent magnitude as function of its period

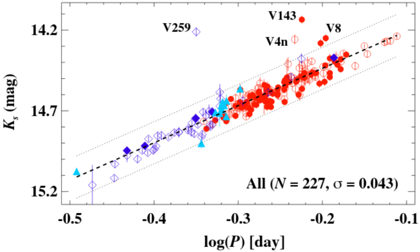

Figure 10 (slightly modified) taken from Bhardwaj et al., AJ 160, 220 (2020)

⇨ slight **trend**: stars with longer periods are a bit brighter

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

To put everything together:

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metallicity is the abundance of elements present in star that are heavier than hydrogen and helium

? For $d(m, P, Z)$, we need to **calibrate** the Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation.

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

calibrate the Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation:

The following methods can be used to determine absolute magnitudes, e.g.:

- Statistical study of the motions of field RR Lyrae stars: statistical parallax. This gives values of M_V ranging from $+0.9$ for short-period, high-metallicity stars, to $+0.5$ for longer-period, lower-metallicity stars. As a statistical method, it must be applied to a large sample of stars, which might not be homogeneous.

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- Fitting of the main sequence of globular clusters containing RR Lyrae stars to a standard main sequence determined for nearby Population II stars with known distances; there are, however, very few of these. This method gives a mean of about $+0.4$ for the RR Lyrae stars in several clusters.

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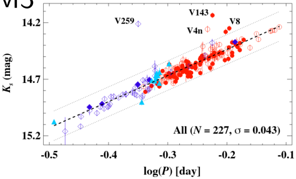
- The Baade-Wesselink method (infer distance from measurement of change in radius (from velocity) and angular diameter) has been applied to some of the brightest RR Lyrae stars; it gives an absolute magnitude of about $+0.5$.

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 1: Distance to the cluster M3



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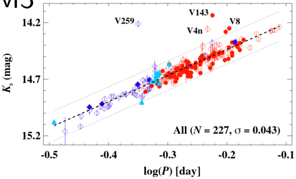

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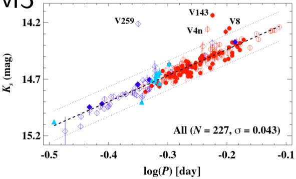

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The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

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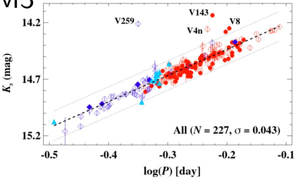

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$$m(K) - M(K) = 14.70 - (-0.35) = 15.05 \text{ mag}$$

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

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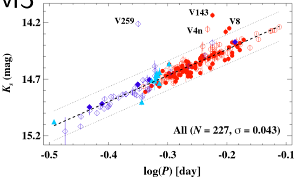

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A: First, we compute the distance modulus, the difference between apparent and absolute magnitude:

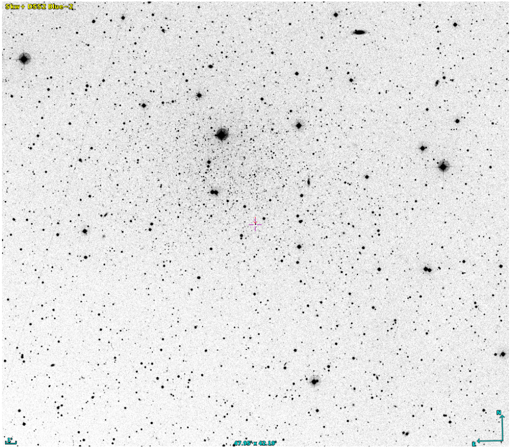
$$m(K) - M(K) = 14.70 - (-0.35) = 15.05 \text{ mag}$$

We then use the distance modulus to calculate the cluster's distance:

$$m - M = 15.05 = 5 \times \log_{10}(d) - 5$$
$$\log_{10}(d) = 4.01$$
$$d = 10^{4.01} = 10200 \text{ pc}$$

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 2: Distance to Draco dwarf spheroidal (dSph) galaxy



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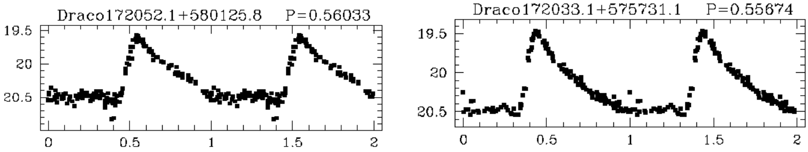
light curves of two RR Lyrae stars within Draco dSph, measured in the V passband



taken from Fig. 1 of Bonanos et al., AJ 127, 861 (2004)

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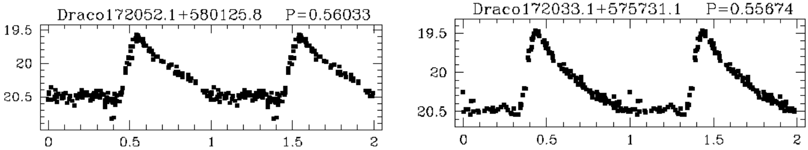

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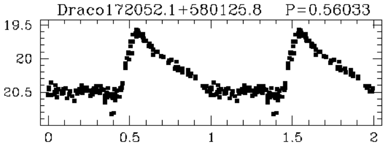
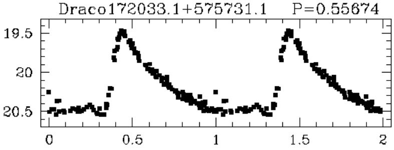




Q: The absolute magnitude of RR Lyrae stars in the V filter is approximately $M(V) = +0.77$. What is the distance to Draco dSph?

A:

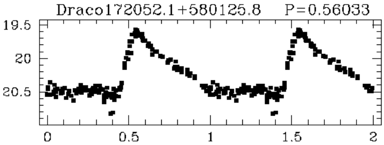
First, we compute the difference between apparent and absolute magnitudes, which is called the "distance modulus":
With the average of the V-band apparent magnitudes being about $m(V) = 20.20$, we get

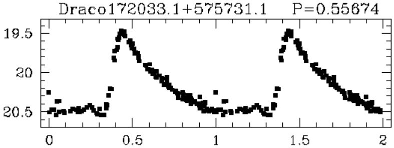
$$m(V) - M(V) = 20.20 - (+0.77) = 19.43 \text{ mag}$$

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 2: Distance to Draco dwarf spheroidal (dSph) galaxy

light curves of two RR Lyrae stars within Draco dSph, measured in the V passband





Q: The absolute magnitude of RR Lyrae stars in the V filter is approximately $M(V) = +0.77$. What is the distance to Draco dSph?

A:
Next, we use the distance modulus equation to calculate the distance to the cluster:

$$m - M = 19.43 = 5 \times \log_{10}(d) - 5$$

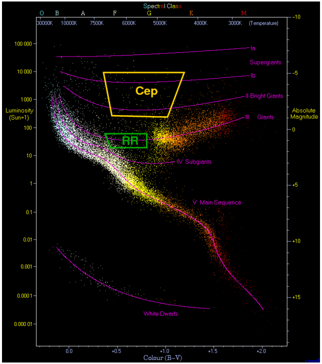
$$5 \times \log_{10}(d) = 24.43$$

$$d = 10^{4.89} = 77000 \text{ pc} = 77 \text{ kpc}$$

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

RR Lyrae stars allow for calculating the distance to globular clusters and dwarf galaxies from measuring their average apparent magnitude, and using the known absolute magnitude.

problem: RR Lyrae stars aren't really luminous. Take a look again at this HR diagram:



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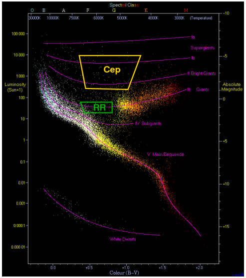

A typical RR Lyrae has a luminosity $\sim 50 L_\odot \Rightarrow$ not powerful enough for us to see these stars in distant galaxies.

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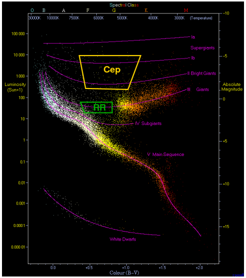


We can use RR Lyrae to measure distances only to the very closest galaxies - members of our own Local Group.
A better choice for **larger distances: Cepheids** which are 100 times more luminous than RR Lyrae stars.

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

we've seen for RR Lyrae stars: assumption of identical absolute magnitude holds well

not so for Cepheids:

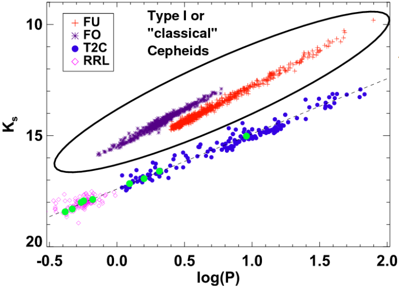
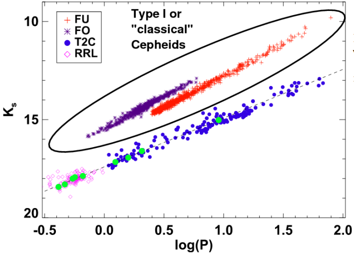


Figure 9. Comparison of K_s-band P–L relation with Classical Cepheids from LMCNISS data and RR Lyraes in the LMC. The green circles represent the calibrator T2Cs and RRLs.

RR Lyrae stars at ∼ the same distance have little variation in period and magnitude, whereas Cepheids show large variation in both

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation



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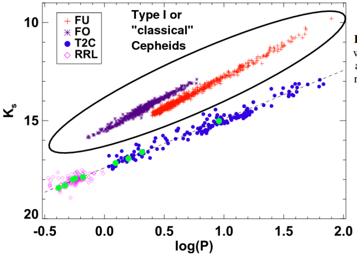

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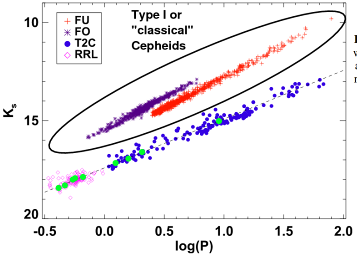
Q: What is the range of periods for these Cepheids?

A: The range is from $\log_{10}(P) = -0.1 \Rightarrow P = 0.8$ days to $\log_{10}(P) = +1.9 \Rightarrow P = 79$ days
$\Rightarrow$ that is about a factor of 100

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation



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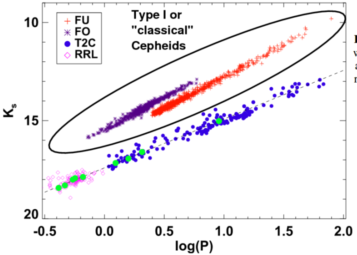

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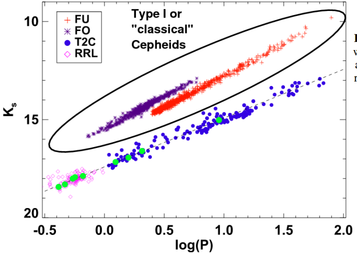
Q: What is the range of magnitudes of these Cepheids?

A: The apparent magnitudes in the K-band range from $\sim$ 16 to 10, which is a range of 6 magnitudes $\Rightarrow$ a factor of about 250 in brightness!

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation



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The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

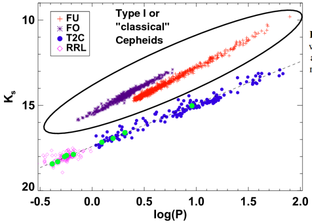
⇨ here we absolutely need a **period-luminosity relation**

to measure the distance to a Cepheid, we need to carry out four steps:

1. measure the average apparent magnitude m of the star
2. measure the period P of variation of brightness
3. use the period to compute the absolute magnitude M
4. use the distance-modulus formula to compute the distance to the star

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 3: A Period-Luminosity Relation for Cepheids



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Q: Write an equation of the form

$$M(V) = A \times \log_{10}(P) + B$$

which is consistent with the data in the graph.

example 3: A Period-Luminosity Relation for Cepheids

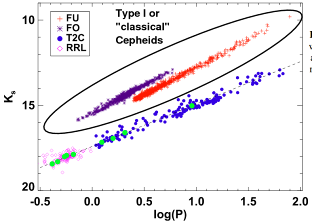


Figure 9. Comparison of K_s-band P–L relation with Classical Cepheids from LMCNISS data and RR Lyraes in the LMC. The green circles represent the calibrator T2Cs and RRLs.

Q: Write an equation of the form

$$M(V) = A \times \log_{10}(P) + B$$

which is consistent with the data in the graph.

A: From the line drawn on the diagram, we can find the endpoints $(0.6, -3.0)$ and $(2.0, -6.5)$. The slope of the line is then approximately

$$A = \frac{-6.5 - (-3.0)}{2.0 - 0.6} = -0.25$$

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 3: A Period-Luminosity Relation for Cepheids

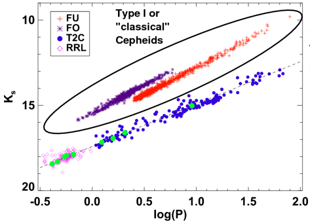


Figure 9. Comparison of K_s-band P–L relation with Classical Cepheids from LMCNISS data and RR Lyraes in the LMC. The green circles represent the calibrator T2Cs and RRLs.

Q: Write an equation of the form

$$M(V) = A \times \log_{10}(P) + B$$

which is consistent with the data in the graph.

A (continued): If we plug into the equation

$$-3.0 = (-2.5 \times 0.6) + B$$

and solve for B, we can find the y-intercept:

example 3: A Period-Luminosity Relation for Cepheids

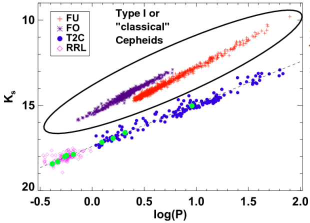


Figure 9. Comparison of K_s-band P–L relation with Classical Cepheids from LMCNISS data and RR Lyraes in the LMC. The green circles represent the calibrator T2Cs and RRLs.

Q: Write an equation of the form

$$M(V) = A \times \log_{10}(P) + B$$

which is consistent with the data in the graph.

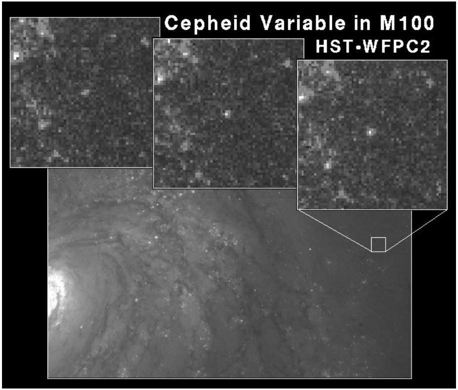
A (continued): So the relationship between period and absolute magnitude is approximately

$$M(V) = -2.5 \times \log_{10}(P) - 1.5$$

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 4: The Distance to M100

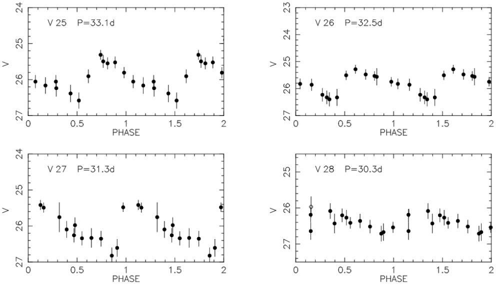
We apply this relationship to measurements of Cepheid variable stars in a relatively nearby galaxy: M100.



The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

example 4: The Distance to M100

We determine the period and apparent magnitude of a few Cepheid light curves in this galaxy.



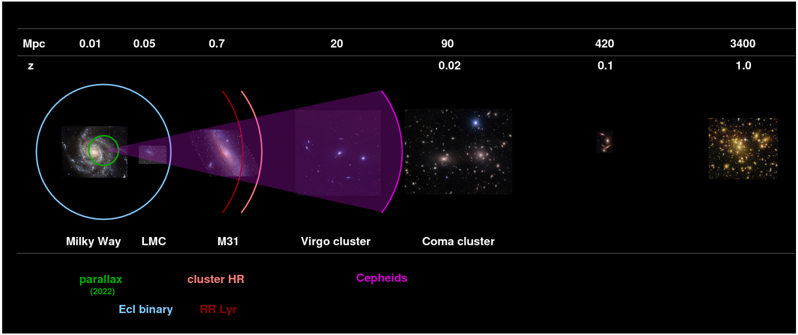
1. Pick one variable star. Measure its average apparent magnitude, m_v.
2. Use its period to determine its absolute magnitude M_V.
3. Compute the distance modulus $(m_V - M_V)$.
4. Compute the distance to this galaxy, in Mpc.

Answer: You should get a distance of $\sim$ 17 Mpc.

The Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relation

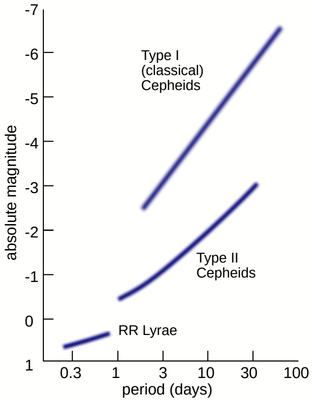
As Cepheids are more luminous than RR Lyrae, with them we can measure distances farther into the depths of space.

In particular, Cepheids allow to measure the distance to the nearest galaxy cluster, the Virgo Cluster.



Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relations for Cepheids and RR Lyrae

Period-luminosity relations are known for several types of pulsating variable stars: type I Cepheids, type II Cepheids, RR Lyrae variables, Mira variables, and other long-period variable stars.



Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relations for Cepheids and RR Lyrae

Population I Cepheids:

Population I Cepheids are stars with relatively high metallicity (like our Sun) and thus are *second generation* stars, found in the disk of our galaxy. Classical Cepheids (also known as Population I Cepheids, type I Cepheids, or Delta Cepheid variables) undergo pulsations with very regular periods on the order of days to months.

The following relationship between a Population I Cepheid's period P and its mean absolute magnitude M_v was established from Hubble Space Telescope trigonometric parallaxes for 10 nearby Cepheids (Thomas et al. (2007), Benedict et al. (2002)):

$$M_\mathrm{v} = (-2.43 \pm 0.12)\,(\log_{10} P - 1) - (4.05 \pm 0.02)$$

Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relations for Cepheids and RR Lyrae

Population II Cepheids:
Population II Cepheids are stars found in globular clusters that are low-metallicity "first generation" stars. Type II Cepheids are fainter than their classical Cepheid counterparts for a given period by about 1.6 magnitudes (about 4 times less luminous).

Period-Luminosity Relations of Population II Cepheids (McNamara 1995):

$P < 10$ days: $M_v = -1.61 \log_{10} P - 0.05$,

$P > 10$ days: $M_v = -4.17 \log_{10} P + 3.06$

The steep slope for stars with $P > 10$ days may be due to an increase of mass with the period of pulsation.

Period-Luminosity(-Metallicity) Relations for Cepheids and RR Lyrae

RR Lyrae Stars:
The PLZ relation is given as (e.g. Catelan2004, Sollima2006):

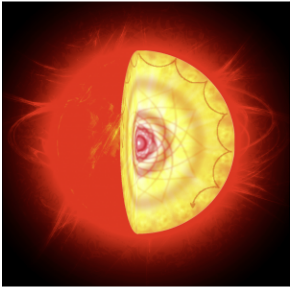
$$M_\lambda = \alpha_\lambda \log_{10}(P/P_{\mathrm{ref}}) + \beta_\lambda([\mathrm{Fe/H}] - [\mathrm{Fe/H}]_{\mathrm{ref}}) + M_{\mathrm{ref},\lambda} + \epsilon$$

where λ denotes the bandpass, P is the period of pulsation, M_{ref} is the absolute magnitude at a reference period and metallicity, and α, β describe the dependence of the absolute magnitude on period and metallicity. The ϵ is a standard normal random variable centered on 0 and with a standard deviation of the uncertainty in M_λ in order to model the intrinsic scatter in the absolute magnitude convolved with unaccounted measurement uncertainties.

Further Pulsation Analysis

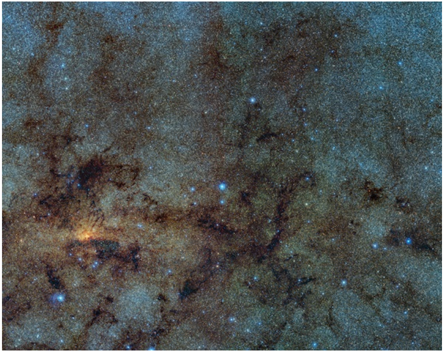
Pulsation is useful for **probing the interiors of stars**, and testing models of stellar structure and evolution: **Asteroseismology**.

Stars have many resonant modes and frequencies, and the path of sound waves passing through a star depends on the speed of sound, which in turn depends on local temperature and chemical composition.



Further Pulsation Analysis

As pulsating stars allow for calculating distances, we can use them to **estimate interstellar reddening** (from dust).



This IR view of the Milky Way's crowded center (taken as part of the ESO's VISTA Variables in the Via Lactea Survey) reveils numerous RR Lyrae stars in our galaxy's bulge, hinting that it is old and may have been built up as primordial star clusters merged over time.

Outlook

Variable stars - supernovae, pulsating variable stars - enable us to calculate **distances** to substructure in our Universe.

We will see how this has shaped our **understanding of the Milky Way and beyond**.