Exploring the SMC to the faintest X-ray fluxes: First results from a Chandra survey

A. Zezas¹, S. Laycock², J. Hong¹, V. Antoniou¹, C. Heinke³, V. Kalogera⁴, J. McDowell¹, J. Drake¹, J. Gallagher⁵, M. Smith⁵, G. Fabbiano¹

(1) Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics (Cambridge, USA), (2) Gemini Observatory (Hilo, USA), (3) University of Virginia (Charlottesville, USA), (4) Northwestern University (Evanston, USA), (5) STScI (Baltimore, USA), (6) University of Wisconsin (Madison, USA)

Introduction and description of the observations

The Small Magellanic Cloud is a prime target for studies of young X-ray source populations. Previous observations with ROSAT (e.g. Haberl et al., 2000), ASCA (Yokogawa et al., 2003), RXTE (Laycock et al., 2005), XMM-Newton (e.g. Sasaki et al., 2002) and Chandra have revealed a rich population of X-ray binary pulsars (XBPs). In addition, its proximity and well studied stellar populations allow us to identify and classify the optical counterparts of the X-ray sources. We obtained 100 ksec exposures of two fields in the SMC selected for their high X-ray pulsar content. The observations are performed with the Chandra ACIS-I detector because of its large field of view.

The main goals of these observations are:

• (a) Study the X-ray binary populations of the SMC down to the levels of quiescent sources (~10⁻³⁴ erg/s).
• (b) Search for low-mass X-ray binaries in the SMC
• (c) Study the coronal emission from stars in a low-metallicity galaxy
• (d) Study in detail two bright supernova remnants.

Data analysis

The data for the individual and coadded exposures for each field were processed with the Champ-Plane pipeline (Hong et al., 2005). In Fig. 1 we show adaptively smoothed X-ray images of the two fields. After the initial processing of the event-files we searched for discrete sources using wavdetect (Freeman et al., 2002). We detect 211 and 191 sources in Field-1 and 2 respectively.

In order to identify the sources associated with High-mass X-ray binaries (HMXBs) we cross-correlated the X-ray sources with stars from the OGLE-II (Udalski et al., 1998) and the MCPS (Zaritsky et al., 2002) catalogs. We find that 41 X-ray sources have optical counterparts consistent with early-type stars (OB sp. types). Fifteen of these sources were also detected in the shallow (10 ksec) Chandra observations of the same fields.

New X-ray pulsars and the XLF of HMXBs in the SMC

We searched for X-ray pulsars by using Lomb-Scargle periodograms. We find three new X-ray pulsars with periods between 6.3s to 892s, and X-ray luminosities between 2×10³⁴ erg/s to 7.7×10³⁵ erg/s. All three new pulsars are associated with early-type stars. In addition we detect 9 known pulsars, while we do not detect pulsations from 2 known X-ray pulsars.

By combining the HMXBs detected in the deep and shallow Chandra surveys of the SMC we can construct their X-ray luminosity function (XLF; fig 2). Since all HMXBs from the shallow observations of these two fields were also detected in the deep observations, we only use their luminosity from the latter data for this XLF.

We find that the XLF is well described by a broken power-law with a break-point at ~4×10³⁴ erg/s and cumulative slopes of ~0.2 and ~0.8 below and above the break respectively. This is consistent with expectations from the onset of the propeller effect at low luminosities (e.g. Shtykovskiy & Gilfanov 2005). However, we do not see an upturn at low luminosities suggestive of an increasing population of quiescent sources.

Fig. 1a: Full band (0.5-8.0keV) adaptively smoothed Chandra ACIS-I images of Field-1. The sources associated with early-type stars are marked with circles. For the detected X-ray pulsars we also give their pulse-periods (new pulsars are marked with asterisks).

Fig. 1b: Same as Fig 1a, but for Field 2 (one new pulsar is located on the ACIS-S CCD which is not shown here).

Fig. 2: The X-ray luminosity function of the X-ray sources detected in both the shallow and deep surveys.