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Published in:
Astrophysical Journal Letters

DOI:
10.1088/2041-8205/790/1/L1

Citation for published version (APA):

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HERSCHEL FINDS EVIDENCE FOR STELLAR WIND PARTICLES IN A PROTOSTELLAR ENVELOPE: IS THIS WHAT HAPPENED TO THE YOUNG SUN?

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Received 2014 February 28; accepted 2014 May 14; published 2014 July 1

ABSTRACT

There is evidence that the young Sun emitted a high flux of energetic (\(\geq 10\) MeV) particles. The collisions of these particles with the material at the inner edge of the Protosolar Nebula disk induced spallation reactions that formed short-lived radionuclies, like \(^{10}\)Be, whose trace is now visible in some meteorites. However, it is poorly known exactly when this happened, and whether and how it affected the solar system. Here, we present indirect evidence for an ejection of energetic particles in the young protostar, OMC-2 FIR 4, similar to that experienced by the young solar system. In this case, the energetic particles collide with the material in the protostellar envelope, enhancing the abundance of two molecular ions, HCO\(^+\) and N\(_2\)H\(^+\), whose presence is detected via Herschel observations. The flux of energetic particles at a distance of 1 AU from the emitting source, estimated from the measured abundance ratio of HCO\(^+\) and N\(_2\)H\(^+\), can easily account for the irradiation required by meteoritic observations. These new observations demonstrate that the ejection of \(\geq 10\) MeV particles is a phenomenon occurring very early in the life of a protostar, before the disappearance of the envelope from which the future star accretes. The whole envelope is affected by the event, which sets constraints on the magnetic field geometry in the source and opens up the possibility that the spallation reactions are not limited to the inner edge of the Protosolar Nebula disk.

Key words: ISM: abundances – ISM: molecules – meteorites, meteors, meteoroids – stars: formation – stars: protostars

Online-only material: color figures

1. INTRODUCTION

The birth of a star is all but a peaceful process. Newborn stars emit X-ray fluxes thousands of times higher than those of the Sun (e.g., Feigelson & Montmerle 1999), UV photons are emitted by violent shocks caused by the gas falling onto the future star and matter is ejected at supersonic speeds in protostellar outflows. Finally, there is circumstantial evidence that the stellar winds of young forming stars accelerate nucleii at energies \(\geq\)MeV, even in Sun-like stars (e.g., Feigelson et al. 2002b). The young Sun also exhibited these violent processes during its formation (e.g., Dauphas & Chaussidon 2011). One of the strongest proofs of this energetic start is the measured high initial over-abundance of short-lived (with half-lives of \(\sim\)1 My) radionuclei, whose decay products we can still find in meteorites today. For example, the calcium–aluminum-rich inclusions (CAIs) of carbonaceous meteorites contain \(^{10}\)Be, with abundances larger than that found in the interstellar medium (ISM; e.g., Meyer & Clayton 2000; Chaussidon et al. 2006). The most accepted theory is that \(^{10}\)Be has been produced by spallation reactions of solar wind nuclei with the quiescent gas at the inner edge of the solar nebula (McKeegan et al. 2000; Gounelle et al. 2001, 2006; Chaussidon & Gounelle 2007; Liu et al. 2010). The observed enrichment suggests doses of about \(10^{19}\)–\(10^{20}\) protons cm\(^{-2}\) (Gounelle et al. 2013). However, alternative theories attribute the measured \(^{10}\)Be enrichment to Galactic cosmic rays (CRs; Desch et al. 2004) or to spallation reactions in the atmosphere of the young Sun and incorporated in the solar wind (Bricker & Caffee 2010).

Observations of young stars provide a crucial tool to understand the early history of the solar system (e.g., Caselli & Ceccarelli 2012). In particular, the detection of large fluxes of energetic particles in young protostars would provide support for the first theory and also help to constrain theories of particle acceleration in stellar winds. Unfortunately, it is practically impossible to directly detect high-energy stellar wind particles. The detection, therefore, must rely on indirect evidence. This detection is a problem similar to finding the astronomical objects where CRs, the \(\geq\)MeV particles pervading our Galaxy, are accelerated. In this case, the indirect detection is based on the effect that CRs have when they hit the H atoms of the ISM: (1) the creation of \(\geq\)GeV particles of \(\pi^0\), which decay into detectable \(\geq\)GeV photons (Hayakawa 1952; Stecker 1971) and (2) the enhancement of ionization in the molecular gas irradiated by \(\leq\)GeV particles (Indriolo et al. 2010; Ceccarelli et al. 2011).

Since the expected \(\geq\)GeV photon flux from protostars is too low to be detected with present facilities, only the second method, the measurement of enhanced molecular gas ionization,
distribution (SLED) is shown in Figure 1. The curves show the intensities predicted by the adopted two-component model, the envelope (magenta) and warm (blue) component respectively (Table 1), and the sum of the two (green). (A color version of this figure is available in the online journal.)

We found acceptable solutions ($\chi^2_{\text{red}} \leq 1$) for two components with [HCO${^+}$]/[N$_2$H$^+$] between three and four and the following can be used to infer the presence of high-energy stellar wind particles in protostars. In Galactic molecular clouds, the molecular ionization is derived from the abundance ratio of DCO$^+$ over HCO$^+$ (Guélin et al. 1977; Caselli et al. 1998). However, this method, based on the enhanced DCO$^+$ abundance, only works for cold ($\lesssim 30$ K) gas. Since the high-energy stellar wind particles will likely affect the innermost and warm regions of the envelope surrounding the new born star, this method cannot be used to measure the ionization caused by the energetic stellar wind particles.

As we will show in the following, the Herschel Space Observatory has provided us with a new probe of the ionization in the warm and dense gas: the abundance ratio of HCO$^+$ over N$_2$H$^+$ derived from highly excited rotational lines, whose upper level energy is $\gtrsim 100$ K.

2. THE DATA SET

The observations and analysis reported here refer to the source OMC-2 FIR 4, at a distance of 420 pc (Kim et al. 2008). Its mass and luminosity are around 30 $M_\odot$ (Mezger et al. 1990; Crimier et al. 2009) and $\lesssim 1000 L_\odot$ (López-Sepulcre et al. 2013; Furlan et al. 2014 quote 100 $L_\odot$ for the FIR embedded protostar), respectively. OMC-2 FIR 4 contains a cluster of a few embedded intermediate and low-mass protostars (Shimajiri et al. 2008; López-Sepulcre et al. 2013).

We observed OMC-2 FIR 4 as part of the Key Program Chemical HERSH/Chemical Surveys of Star forming regions (CHESS; Ceccarelli et al. 2009). The observations were obtained with the Herschel HIFI spectrometer (de Graauw et al. 2010) in 2010 and 2011. The survey covers the 480–1244 GHz frequency range with a spectral resolution of 1.1 MHz. The telescope beam size varies from 41 to 18 arcsec for the lowest to the highest frequencies. The data were reduced with the ESA HIPE v8 package (Ott 2010). The overall survey of OMC-2 FIR 4 and more details on the data reduction are presented in Kama et al. (2013).

Eight HCO$^+$, two H$^{13}$CO$^+$, and seven N$_2$H$^+$ lines are detected, all with upper level energies between $\sim 90$ and 400 K, implying the presence of warm and dense gas (see Section 3.1 for a quantitative analysis). The observed spectral line energy distribution (SLED) is shown in Figure 1.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Physical Conditions and Column Densities

In order to derive the physical conditions of the emitting gas and the relevant column densities, we used the non-LTE large velocity gradient (LVG) code by Ceccarelli et al. (2003), with the collisional coefficients for HCO$^+$ with para-H$_2$ from Flower (1999), retrieved from the BASECOL database (http://basecol.obspm.fr/; Dubernet et al. 2013). Because the N$_2$H$^+$ collisional coefficients are not available, we used the same coefficients as those calculated for HCO$^+$, after scaling for the different molecular weight, because they have a similar electronic structure and molecular weight. In our calculations, we used these collisional coefficients for ortho-H$_2$ as well.

We ran a grid of models covering a large parameter space in temperature (from 25 to 150 K), H$_2$ density (from $6 \times 10^5$ to $1 \times 10^6$ cm$^{-3}$), HCO$^+$ and N$_2$H$^+$ column density (from $1 \times 10^{13}$ to $2 \times 10^{15}$ cm$^{-2}$), and source size (0.1–200 arcsec).

Crimier et al. (2009) modeled the dust continuum emission of the outer envelope of OMC-2 FIR 4 and derived the temperature and density profiles shown in Figure 2. Using this model, we failed to reproduce the observed SLEDs. While the lower $J$ lines can be reproduced, the higher $J$ lines cannot. Therefore, we modeled the SLED of HCO$^+$, H$^{13}$CO$^+$, and N$_2$H$^+$ simultaneously, assuming that the emission originates from two components, one of which is the cold outer envelope, and the other a warmer, denser envelope. Our aim is to estimate the average density, temperature, size, and HCO$^+$ and N$_2$H$^+$ abundances in the second component. Since HCO$^+$ and N$_2$H$^+$ share a very similar molecular structure, chemical origin (Section 3.2), and excitation mechanisms, it is highly likely that they are located in the same regions—which we will assume in the following. Some general considerations help to constrain the explored parameter space. First, the HCO$^+$ lines are likely only moderately optically thick, as the HCO$^+$ over H$^{13}$CO$^+$ line intensity ratio is $\sim 30$, slightly smaller than the standard $^{12}$C/$^{13}$C ratio ($\sim 75$; Wilson & Rood 1994). Second, the HCO$^+$ over N$_2$H$^+$ line intensity ratio is between 3 and 5. Therefore, we considered the [HCO$^+$]/[N$_2$H$^+$] abundance ratio between 3 and 10.

We found acceptable solutions ($\chi^2_{\text{red}} \leq 1$) for two components with [HCO$^+$]/[N$_2$H$^+$] between three and four and the following

![Figure 1. Spectral line energy distribution (SLED) of HCO$^+$ (circles), H$^{13}$CO$^+$ (triangles), and N$_2$H$^+$ (stars) as a function of the upper $J$ transition. The curves show the intensities predicted by the adopted two-component model, the envelope (magenta) and warm (blue) component respectively (Table 1), and the sum of the two (green). (A color version of this figure is available in the online journal.)](image1)

![Figure 2. Dust density (blue) and temperature (red) profiles as derived from dust continuum emission (Crimier et al. 2009). The dashed boxes show the values derived in this work of the gas temperature and density, as determined by the LVG analysis for the envelope around 4000 AU and the warm component around 2000 AU, respectively. The stars show the two-component model adopted for the chemical and thermal analysis. (A color version of this figure is available in the online journal.)](image2)

Ceccarelli et al.

Table 1
Parameters of the Gas Emitting HCO+ and N2H+, as Derived from the Non-LTE LVG (Top) and Chemical (Bottom) Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source radius (AU)</th>
<th>1600</th>
<th>1250–3000</th>
<th>3700</th>
<th>3500–5000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temperature (K)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>75–150</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source size (arcsec)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6–15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 density (cm(^{-3}))</td>
<td>4.0 × 10(^7)</td>
<td>1–80 × 10(^7)</td>
<td>1.2 × 10(^6)</td>
<td>0.8–2 × 10(^6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source radius (AU)</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1250–3000</td>
<td>3700</td>
<td>3500–5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N(HCO+) (cm(^{-2}))</td>
<td>7 × 10(^15)</td>
<td>6–15 × 10(^15)</td>
<td>3 × 10(^14)</td>
<td>2–6 × 10(^14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N(N2H+) (cm(^{-2}))</td>
<td>3 × 10(^15)</td>
<td>2–5 × 10(^15)</td>
<td>1 × 10(^14)</td>
<td>0.5–2 × 10(^14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCO+/N2H+</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3–4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. The parameter range is obtained considering solutions with χ\(^2\) red ≤ 1 equivalent to a 1σ level of confidence.

a Parameters of the model adopted for the chemistry and thermal analysis.
b Abundances with respect to H2.

properties: (1) a first component whose temperature and density are 30–45 K and 0.8–2 × 10\(^7\) cm\(^{-3}\), respectively, namely those of the envelope at radii between 3500 and 5000 AU (Figure 2); (2) a second component whose temperature and density are 75–150 K and 1–80 × 10\(^7\) cm\(^{-3}\), and relatively compact, 6–14 arcsec, equivalent to a radius of 1250–3000 AU. Table 1 lists the parameters of the solution adopted for the chemical analysis and the range of permitted values. The predicted SLED of the adopted solution is plotted in Figure 1, together with the observations. Figure 2 shows the density and temperature of the gas derived from the LVG analysis, compared with the envelope profiles.

3.2. Chemistry

The most remarkable result from the previous analysis is the low value of [HCO+]/[N2H+] ∼ 3–4, much lower than that expected in similar astrophysical environments (Figure 3). This value is close to the elemental abundance ratio of C/N, two elements that are present in molecular clouds mostly in the form of CO and N2.

The main chemical pathway to the formation of HCO+ and N2H+ is the reaction of CO and N2, respectively, with H3+, an ion created from the ionization of H2 by CR:

\[ \text{CO} (N_2) + H_3^+ \rightarrow \text{HCO}^+ (N_2H^+) + H_2. \]

Since the production mechanism of both molecules is the same, the reason why the [HCO+]/[N2H+] abundance ratio is normally much larger than three lies in the chemical reactions that lead to the destruction of these molecules. Usually CO, being the most abundant neutral, is the main destroyer. When a neutral CO molecule collides with N2H+, the product is HCO+ (e.g., Bergin & Langer 1997). The way to lower [HCO+]/[N2H+] is, therefore, either to lower the CO abundance (≤ 10\(^{-5}\)) and not the N2 or to introduce a destruction channel that acts symmetrically on both molecules. The previous analysis shows that the HCO+ emission originates in warm regions, where CO is unlikely trapped in CO ices. Some carbon may be trapped in less volatile CO2 ices. However, using the Furlan et al. (2014) spectrum toward OMC-2 FIR 4, we estimate a CO2 abundance of ∼ 5 × 10\(^{-6}\). Therefore, a low CO abundance hypothesis cannot work. Candidates for a symmetric destroyer channel are reactions with neutral molecules whose abundance is ≥ 10\(^{-5}\), or electrons.

The only neutral molecule candidate is H2O. However, in both components the dust and gas temperatures are too low to produce a sufficiently large H2O abundance (by ice sublimation and gas phase reactions) (Figure 2). To verify this, we analyzed the H2O lines in the CHESS spectrum. Although the H2O lines are much broader (≈ 20 km s\(^{-1}\)) than the HCO+ and N2H+ lines (≤ 5 km s\(^{-1}\)), implying that they do not originate in the same gas, we can use them for a sanity check, to give an upper limit to the water abundance in the envelope and warm component, respectively. To this end, we ran LVG models, using the parameters in Table 1. We find that the water abundance is ∼ 10\(^{-6}\), confirming that the major destroyer of HCO+ and N2H+ cannot be water molecules.

The only alternative destroyer of HCO+ and N2H+ are, therefore, free electrons. The question is what could cause a large electron abundance. In principle, there are three possibilities: UV radiation, X-rays, and accelerated ≥ MeV particles, namely CR-like particles (for simplicity, we will call them CR). UV photons can be ruled out, as they would destroy H2 (whose rate of formation is only given by the CR flux) and, consequently inhibit the production of HCO+ and N2H+. To verify this, we ran the Meudon photodissociation region (PDR) code (http://pdr.obspm.fr/PDRcode.html; Le Petit et al. 2006) and found that, as expected, [HCO+]/[N2H+] ≥ 10\(^3\) in the PDR. X-ray irradiation does increase the electron abundance by ionizing H2 molecules and creating the H3+ ions, similarly to what happens to CR irradiated molecular gas.
(e.g., Maloney et al. 1996; Meijerink et al. 2006). However, Chandra X-ray observations of the region did not detect emission from OMC-2 FIR 4, therefore putting an upper limit to the X-ray flux in the energy range from 0.5 to 8 keV of $4 \times 10^{-16}$ erg cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ (Feigelson et al. 2002a). For a source at a distance of 420 pc, this implies a limit on the luminosity emerging from the protostar of $\lesssim 8 \times 10^{37}$ erg s$^{-1}$. Translating this into an X-ray source luminosity requires assumptions of the column density and the shape of the X-ray spectrum. We follow the formalism by Maloney et al. (1996). Using a hydrogen column density of $2 \times 10^{23}$ cm$^{-2}$ (Crimier et al. 2009), the observed luminosity limit translates into an X-ray luminosity limit of the central source of $0.03 - 70 \times 10^{30}$ erg s$^{-1}$ for an X-ray spectrum that is flat or $\propto E^{-3}$, respectively. In either case, the resulting limit for the X-ray ionization rate in the envelope at 3700 AU is $\sim 1.5 \times 10^{-20}$ s$^{-1}$, too small to explain the ionization rate probed by our observations. This result is very robust because it is a direct consequence of the observed X-ray limit and rather independent of assumptions about the intrinsic X-ray spectrum. The same X-ray luminosity could lead to higher rates closer to the emitting source if the attenuating column is significantly lower. Therefore, while an X-ray contribution in the warm component emitting source if the attenuating column is significantly lower.

3.3. Thermal Balance

In conclusion, the observed small [HCO$^+$/[N$_2$H$^+$]] ratio is due to a strongly enhanced flux of CR-like particles. In Figure 3, we plot [HCO$^+$/[N$_2$H$^+$]] at different densities and CR ionization rates, $\zeta$, for a gas at temperatures of 40 and 120 K, respectively (Table 1). Comparison between observations and model predictions provide us with constraints on $\zeta$: $1.5 - 8 \times 10^{-14}$ and $\geq 1.5 \times 10^{-12}$ s$^{-1}$ in the envelope and warm component, respectively.

3.4. Energetic Particle Flux

The analysis of the two previous subsections provides compelling evidence for the presence of a source of CR-like particles inside the OMC-2 FIR 4 envelope, as the inner warm component is the one with the higher ionization rate. Of particular relevance here is the flux of particles with $E \geq 10$ MeV, as they can form $^{10}$Be by spallation reactions (Sisterson et al. 1997; Lange et al. 1995; Gounelle et al. 2006), and how it compares with the fluence estimated for the $^{10}$Be meteoritic enrichment: $\sim 2 - 30 \times 10^{19}$ protons cm$^{-2}$ (Gounelle et al. 2013). The underlying hypothesis is that the young Sun underwent flares, similar to those observed in YSOs (e.g., Lee et al. 1998; Feigelson et al. 2002b). In order to estimate the $E \geq 10$ MeV particle fluence, we need to know the emitted particle energy spectrum. We derived it from the measured $\zeta$ at 3700 AU (Table 1) as follows. We first assumed an input particle energy spectrum and computed $\zeta$ at 3700 AU, taking into account the geometric dilution and attenuation caused by the material between the source and 3700 AU. Then, we scaled the input particle energy spectrum so that the measured $\zeta$ at 3700 AU is reproduced. Finally, we computed the $E \geq 10$ MeV particle flux at, for example, a distance of 1 AU, assuming that there is no attenuation on this scale.

Following Gounelle et al. (2001), we assumed a 0.1–100 MeV input particle energy spectrum $f(E) \propto E^p$, with $p$ varying between $-4$ and $-2.5$. To compute the attenuation, we used the formalism described in Padovani et al. (2009). Since the column density between the emitting source and 3700 AU is uncertain ($1.5 \times 10^{23}$ cm$^{-2}$ according to the Crimier et al. 2009 model), we consider it a variable of the model. The results of these computations are shown in Figure 4. We found that for a column density of $1.5 \times 10^{23}$ cm$^{-2}$ the flux is $\sim 1 - 3 \times 10^{19}$ protons cm$^{-2}$ yr$^{-1}$. Therefore, an irradiation time of a few years at 1 AU (or correspondingly longer at larger distances) would easily account for the fluence derived by Gounelle et al. (2013). We are aware that we ignore effects of magnetic fields on the propagation of energetic particles, such as (partial) confinement (Gounelle et al. 2001) and path distortions that increase the attenuation columns (Padovani et al. 2013). Quantifying these effects would require knowledge of the magnetic field in the region. However, our simple calculations suggest an $E \geq 10$ MeV particle flux similar to, if not larger than, that of the young Sun.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We presented the analysis of the HCO$^+$ and N$_2$H$^+$ SLED, observed by the Herschel HIFI CHESS Key Program toward
the protostar OMC-2 FIR 4. The comparison with a non-LVG model shows the presence of a warm (~120 K) and dense (~4 × 10^7 cm^-3) component, in addition to the envelope (~40 K and ~1 × 10^6 cm^-3) probed by continuum observations (Crimier et al. 2009).

The most remarkable and important result of this work is the derived low [HCO^+]/[N_2H^+] abundance ratio: ~3–4. We showed that this suggests the presence of a large flux of CR-like particles inside the envelope, with a ionization rate of 1.5–8 × 10^{-14} and ≥1.5 × 10^{-12} s^{-1} in the envelope and warm component, respectively.

The estimated flux of E ≥ 10 MeV particles at 1 AU distance from the emitting source, >1–3 × 10^{19} protons cm^{-2} yr^{-1}, is more than that recorded in the 10Be of meteoritic material assuming flare times of a few years.

The present observations support the theory that meteoritic 10Be was formed in situ by spallation reactions, rather than moved from the solar atmosphere (Section 1). They also show that young protostars still embedded in their placental envelope can be sites of energetic particle ejections, as indirectly suggested for the young Sun by the recent analysis of 10Be in CAI 411 (Gounelle et al. 2013). These particles affect the entire envelope, and not only the circumstellar disk, providing constraints on the magnetic field structure. These findings will certainly have an impact on the present theories of the energetic particle acceleration in the young solar system as well as on the magnetic field geometry in protoclusters.

We are indebted to an anonymous referee for very useful comments on CR transport. CC and AL-S acknowledge funding from the French space agency CNES. Herschel is an ESA space observatory with science instruments provided by European-led principal Investigator consortia and with important participation from NASA.

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5