INPE-5340-PRE/1739

THE ECLIPSING CATACLYSMIC VARIABLE AY PISCIUM*

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INPE São José dos Campos Setembro de 1991

SECRETARIA DA CIÊNCIA E TECNOLOGIA INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE PESQUISAS ESPECIAIS

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Publicado no Astronomy and Astrophysics

v.238:170-172, 1990

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CDU: 523

Key Words: Eclipsing; cataclysmic variable;

piscium



The eclipsing cataclysmic variable AY Piscium*

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Received March 20, accepted May 1, 1990

Abstract. Photometric observations of the cataclysmic variable AY Psc are presented. We found that the star shows deep eclipses with an orbital period of 5.2 h. The orbital ephemeris is given as well as an analysis of 30 h of fast photometry.

Key words: stars: binaries: close - eclipses - stars: novae

1. Introduction

The cataclymic variable AYPsc (PG 0134+070=NSV 0564=PHL 1065) was suggested to be a U Gem star (Sandage & Luyten 1967) on the basis of its blue color, variations of several tenths of magnitudes on photographic plates and because of the presence of the Balmer series in emission. On that occasion, the magnitude of the star was estimated to be V=16.6. Later its spectrum was observed by Green et al. (1982) in a search for cataclysmic variables among blue objects (the "Patomar-Green Survey") and it was characterized as having a high excitation spectrum. Shugarov (1984) showed that this star declined 0.8 mag in 6 d and the same author discovered a photometric variability between 14.5 and 16.4. Because of its "high excitation" characteristic, we included this object in a search for new DQ Her stars.

2. Observations and results

AY Psc system was observed in September 1988 and in October and November 1989 with the 1.6 m telescope of Laboratório Nacional de Astrofisica in Brazópolis, MG, Brasil. Offset-guided photometers with one and two channels were used with thermoelectrically cooled photomultipliers. The light curves were obtained in white light and in the U, B, V, R, I bands with 10 s time resolution. The count rate was corrected for the sky background and atmospheric extinction using standard procedures. In the measurements of November 1989, the light curve of the comparison star was obtained simultaneously and reduced in the same way as the variable star. This allows a fine control on the effects of atmospheric extinction along the run.

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The light curves of the variable star show intense intrinsic flickering as well as deep eclipses of the primary component every 5.22 h (Fig. 1). A total of 7 eclipses were observed and the timings of minima were estimated by fitting a cubic polinomial to the bottom of each eclipse. These timings are listed in Table 1. The best fit linear ephemeris (2σ uncertainties quoted) is

$$HJD_{min} = 2447623.3463(\pm 4) + 0.2173209(\pm 4) E$$

the standard deviation for this ephemeris is 0.0025 cycles and the residuals are shown in Fig. 2. The eclipses are 1.75 deep in integral light and the full width at half depth is 0.05 cycle. The shape of the eclipse is typical of eclipsing accretion disks. There is no evidence for presence of a compact central source in the average eclipse profile (Fig. 3) nor in the individual eclipses. The measurements in the U, B, V, R, and I passbands indicate that the eclipses are deeper in short wavelengths (Fig. 4). An increase in the width of the eclipse towards the red is also seen in October 7 data, resembling other long period eclipsing systems.

The magnitude and colors of the system outside eclipses on October 9, 1989 (JD 2447808.6964; $\phi = 0.9$) are:

$$V = 15.27 (\pm 5)$$

$$U - B = -0.78 (\pm 7)$$

$$B - V = 0.15 (\pm 4)$$

$$V - R = 0.17 (\pm 3)$$

$$R - I = 0.16 (\pm 3)$$

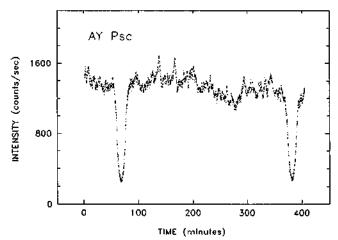


Fig. 1. Light curve of AY Psc on November 2, 1989. The intensity scale is in counts/s outside the atmosphere

Table 1. Journal of observations and timings of minimum

Date (start UT)	HJD-2440000 (min)	O-C (cycles)	Cycle (E)	Duration * (min)	PMT b	Atmospheric condition s
8 Sep. 1988	7412.76312	0.00375	-969	65	EMI 9658 (1)	C
9 Sep. 1988	=-	-		215	EM1 9658 (1)	В
17 Sep. 1988	7421.88976	-0.00011	-927	From plot is	n Szkody et al. (1989)	_
18 Sep. 1988	7422,97559	-0.00371	-922	From plot in Szkody et al. (1989)		
3 Oct. 1989	_	-	_	148	HAM R943-02(1)	Α
7 Oct. 1989	7806.76529	0.00087	844	168	HAM R 943-02(1)	В
9 Oct. 1989	7808.72082	-0.00078	853	143	HAM R943-02(1)	Ā
10 Oct. 1989	7809.59013	-0.00064	857	229	HAM R943-02(1)	В
1 Nov. 1989	7832.62695	0.00303	963	328	EMI 9789 (2)	Ã
2 Nov. 1989	7833.49516	-0.00188	967	405	EMI 9789 (2)	Ä
	7833.71278	-0.00052	968		2 7.07 (2)	13

a All curves were obtained with a time resolution of 10 s

A: good, B: acceptable, C: poor

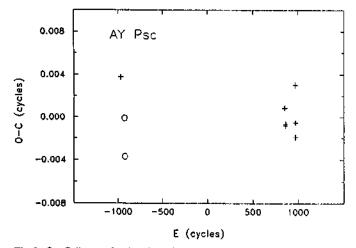


Fig. 2. O-C diagram for the adopted ephemeris. Circles indicate timings taken from Figs 9a and 9b in Szkody et al. (1989)

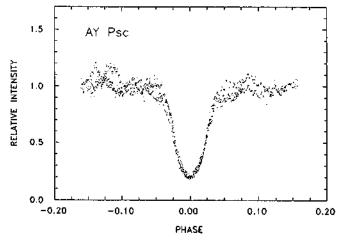


Fig. 3. Profile of the eclipses of AYPsc in November 1989. The intensity was normalized to the mean level outside eclipse

The average behaviour of the system outside eclipse was studied by folding all the data sets at the orbital period. There is no evidence of a hot spot at phase 0.8. Flickering is seen along all the orbital cycle with semiamplitude of about 0.008 (rms). A test using F statistics on the data between eclipses indicates that a sine wave with semiamplitude of 0.0017 and maximum at phase 0.06 fits the data better than a constant, at a 5.6σ confidence level (Quast et al. 1983).

The observations of high excitation emission lines motivated a search for short pulsations in the system, possibly caused by a magnetized white dwarf. For this purpose, the eclipses were removed and periodograms were calculated for the 1988 and 1989 data. No significant peak was found. In the periodograms of October and November 1989, non-significant peaks with periods of $1310(\pm 60)$ and $1285(\pm 40)$ s respectively are visible in the red noise region of the periodogram; no periodicities with semiamplitude greater than 0%008 are present for periods in the range 40-550 s.

This object has never been reported as having dwarf nova like eruptions. The high excitation emission lines, present in this object are never seen as strong features in dwarf novae. Moreover, the absence of a conspicuous hot spot signature in the light curve, usually seen in eclipsing dwarf novae, also suggests that this object in not a dwarf nova. Such characteristics point towards a classification of nova-like or pre-nova; in such objects high excitation lines are frequently observed (Watts 1985; Echevarria 1988). Low states of emission such as occur in nova-like objects of type VY ScI have not been reported, perhaps because the system was seldom observed.

The absence of the white dwarf eclipses signature as well as of the hot spot indicates that the accretion rate through the disk must be quite high. The empirical relation of Patterson (1984) gives a value of 10^{-8} to 10^{-9} M_{\odot} yr⁻¹ for the accretion rate and a mass of 0.5 M_{\odot} for a main sequence secondary is suggested. The variation of the color indices along the eclipse suggest that a fraction of the light at minimum is coming from the red dwarf. Using the infrared

^b (1): single-channel photometer, (2): two channel photometer

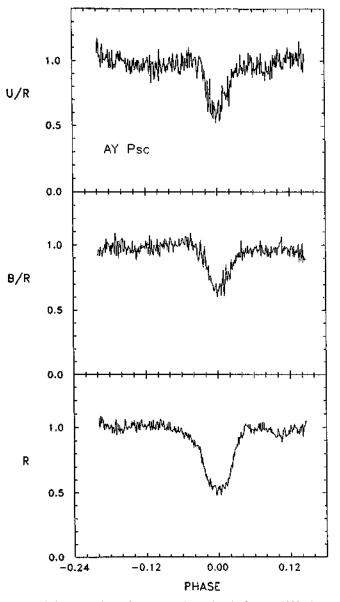


Fig. 4. Colour behaviour of AY Psc during eclipse in October 1989, shown as normalized flux ratios. The average of two eclipses is shown

flux at the eclipse minimum and assuming a main sequence secondary we estimate an upper limit to the absolute magnitude of $M_V = +7.1$ and a lower limit to the distance of 370 pc. This limit for the distance implies that AY Psc is at more than 300 pc from the galactic plane. More spectroscopic and photometric measurements of this star are needed in order to better characterize its nature. The similarity to the old nova BT Mon should, perhaps, be noted. This object was studied spectroscopically by Williams (1989) who suggested that its white dwarf is magnetized and that the strong He II 4686 line emission indicates the presence of magnetic fields in such systems. Such a conclusion was derived from the fact that the He II line does not behave during the eclipse as coming from a disk. As AY Psc has strong He II in emission, is eclipsing, has a long period and is bright, it offers an excellent opportunity to verify that hypothesis.

After a first version of this paper was written we learned that Szkody et al. (1989) also observed this object and found results that are consistent with the ones reported here. The timings of the two eclipses, taken from the plots in their paper, were included in our analysis.

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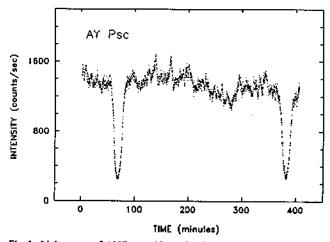


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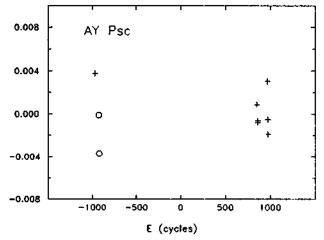
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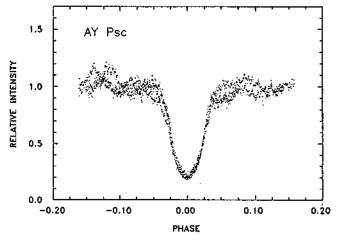


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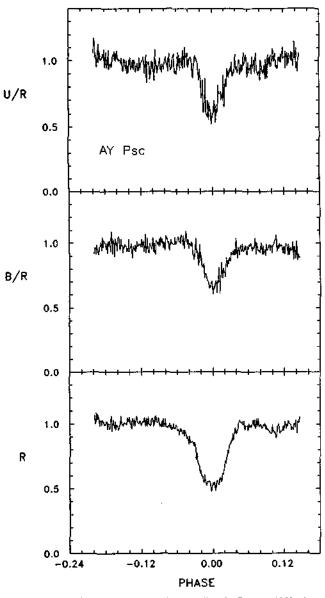


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