



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



Magnetic Fields in Proto-clusters towards the SKAO Era

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Annalisa Bonafede (University of Bologna)

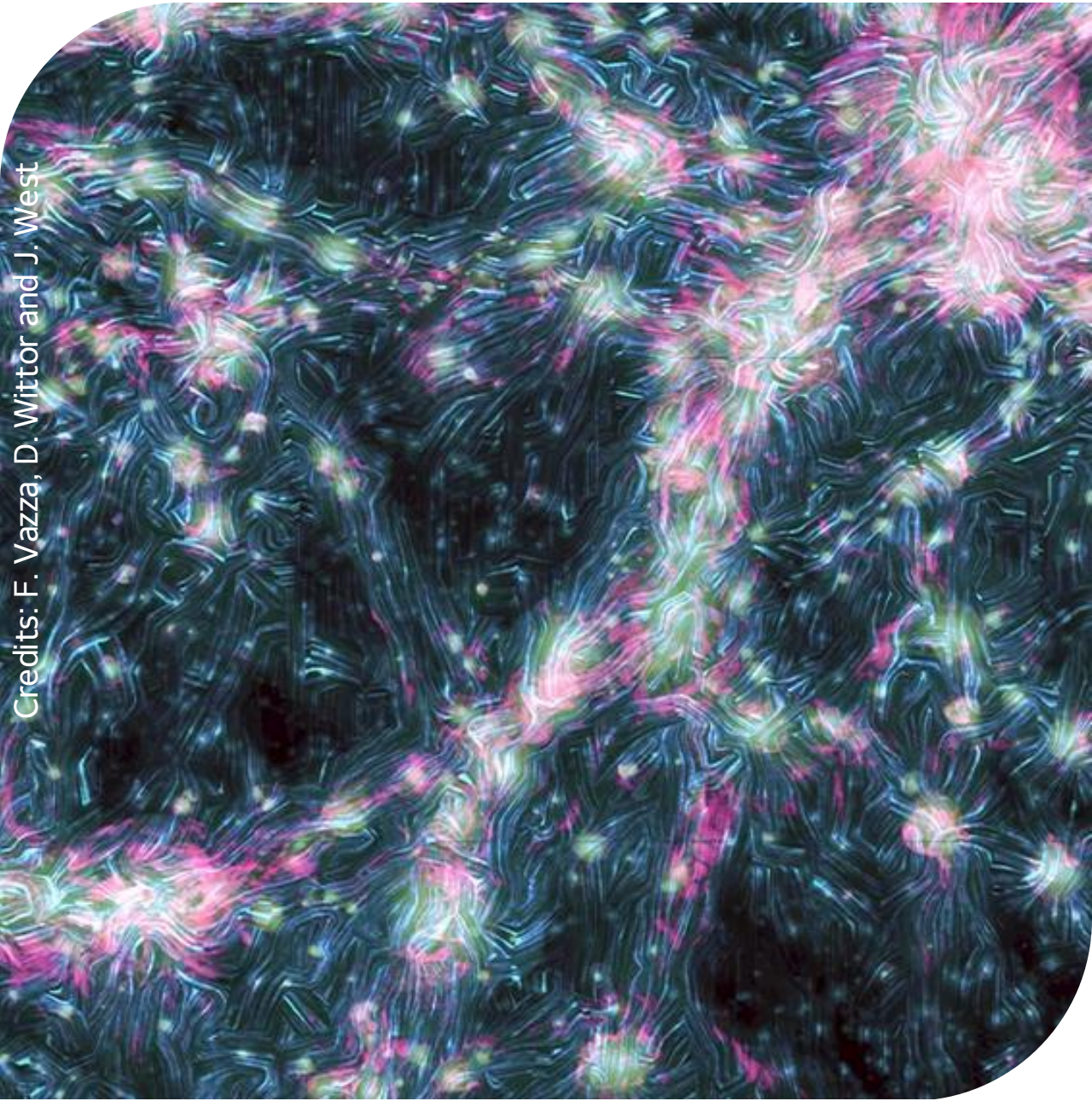
Co-supervisors:

Chiara Stuardi (INAF – IRA),

Christopher J. Riseley (University of Bochum)

26th November 2026 – Fifth National Workshop on the SKAO project – Bologna, Italy

Magnetic fields are *everywhere* in the Universe...

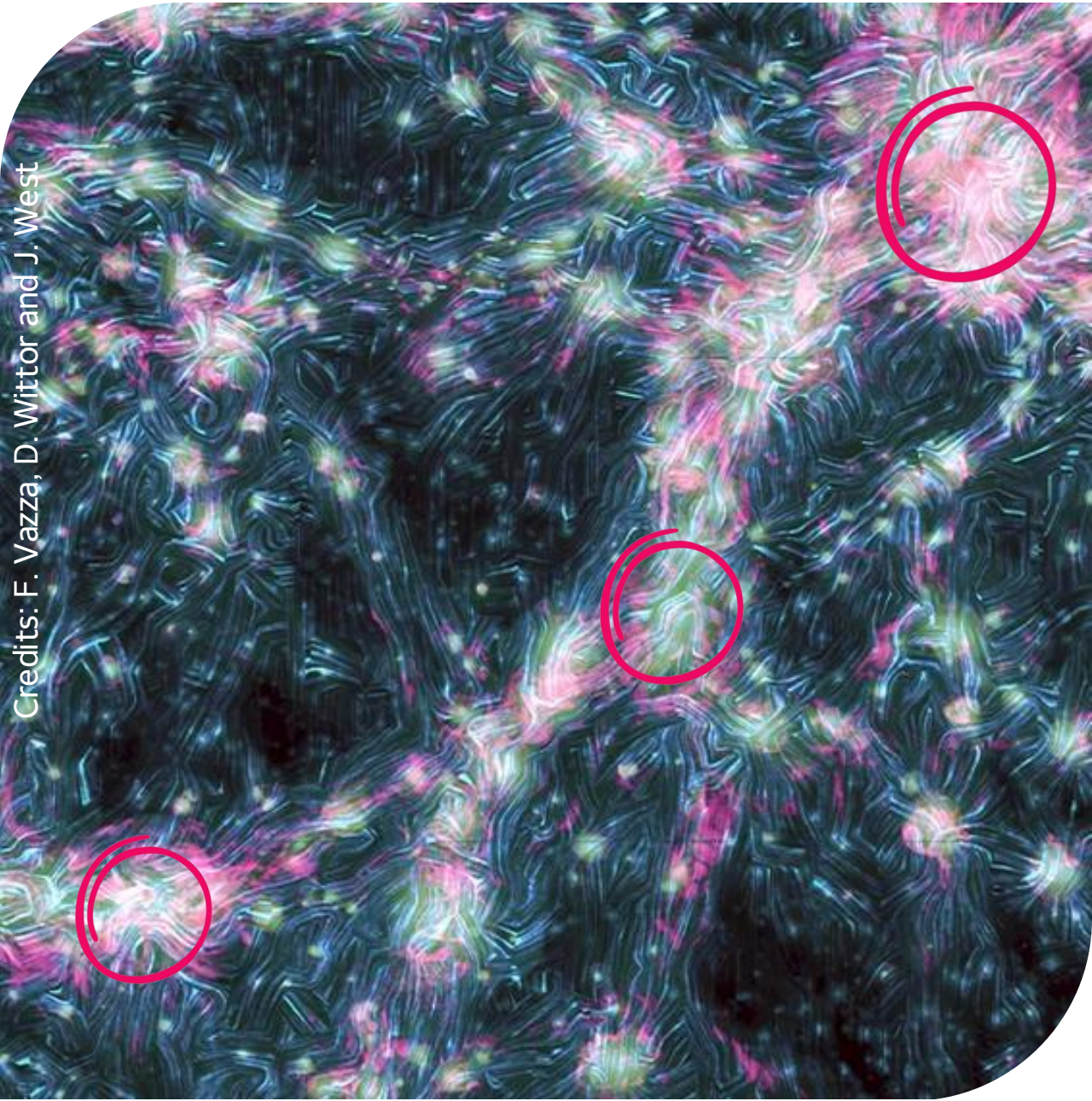


Credits: F. Vazza, D. Wittor and J. West

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... at the *nodes* of the Cosmic Web:

Galaxy clusters



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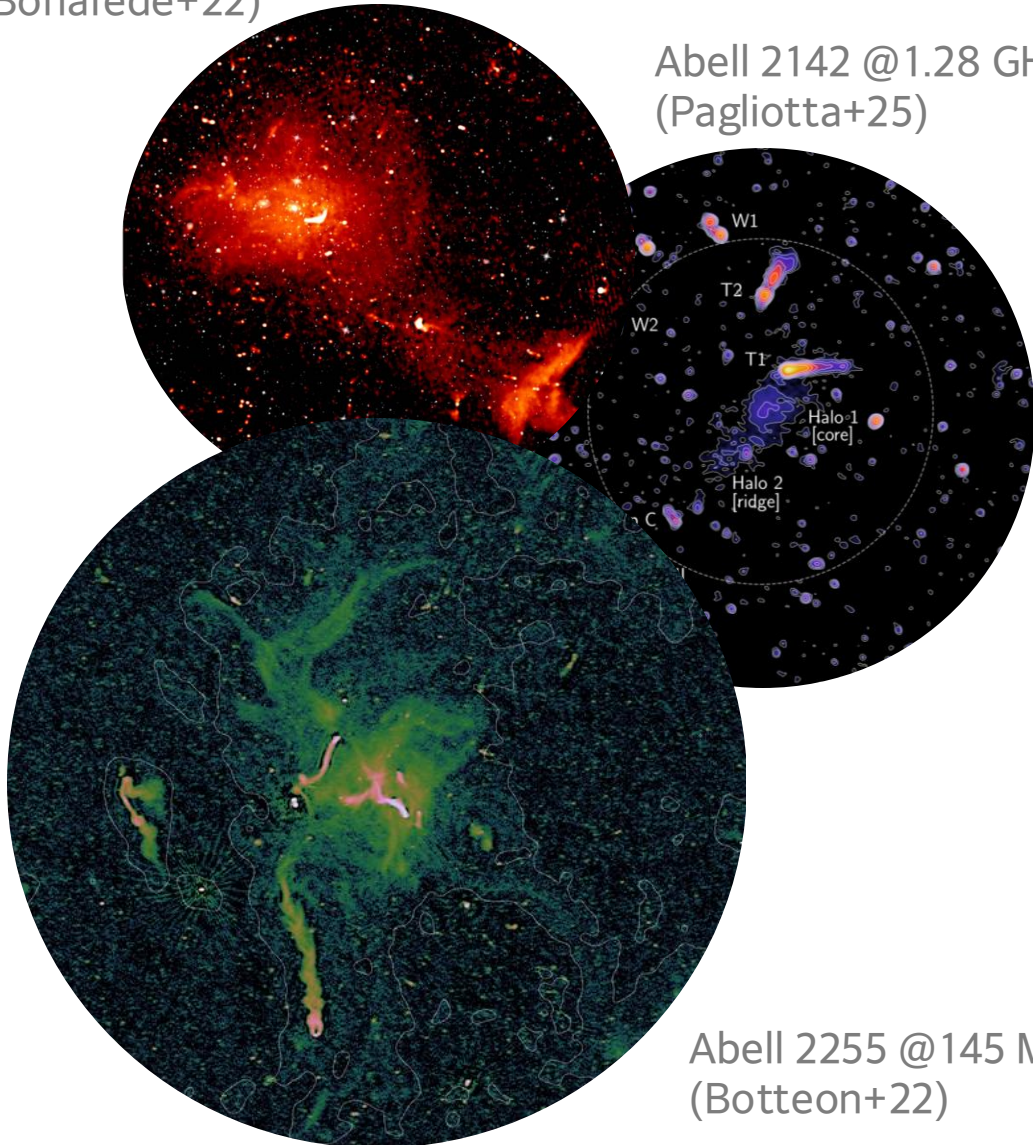
Magnetic fields are *everywhere* in the Universe...

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Galaxy clusters

Coma @144 MHz
(Bonafede+22)

Abell 2142 @1.28 GHz
(Pagliotta+25)



Abell 2255 @145 MHz
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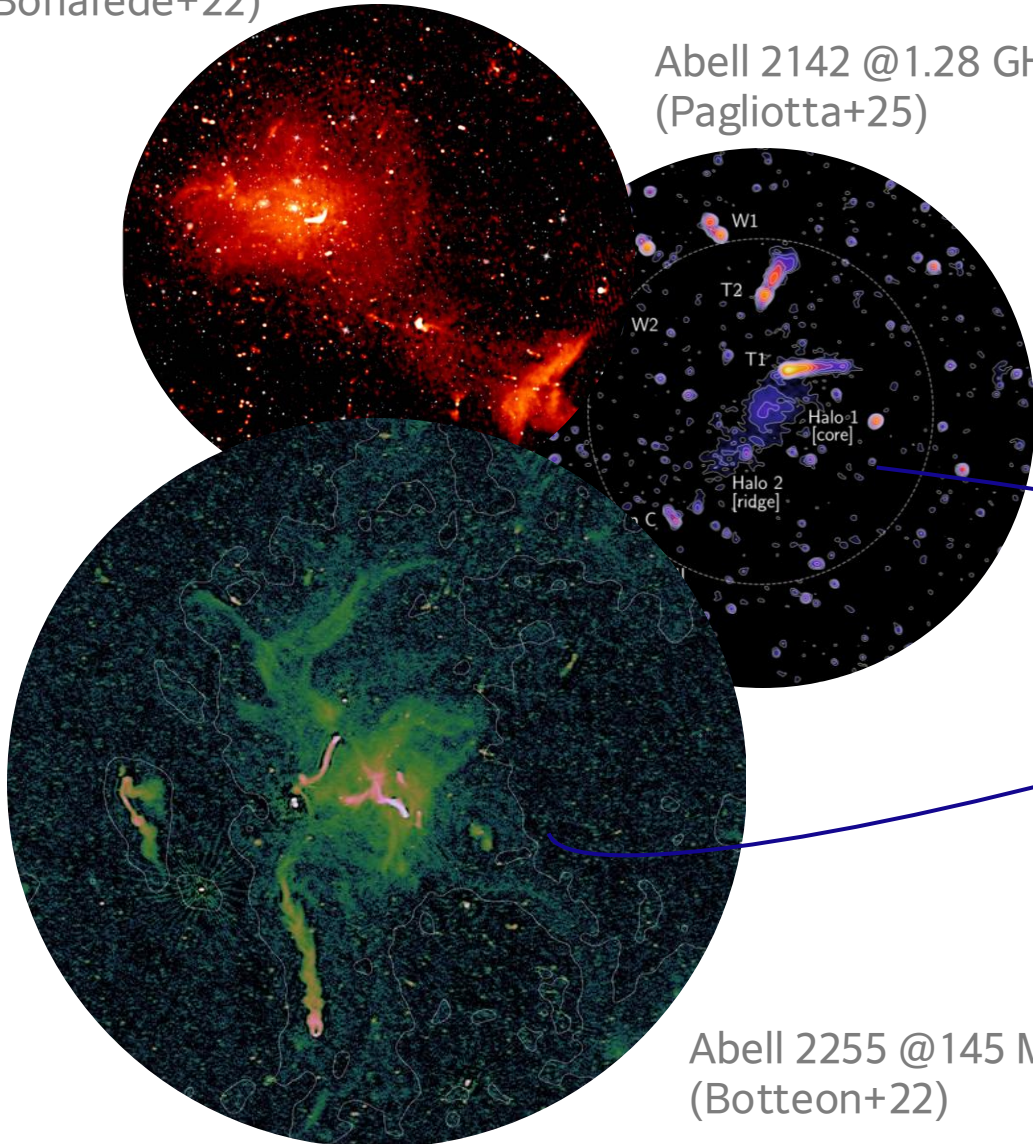
Galaxy clusters

diffuse radio synchrotron emission as a
probe of the **Intra-cluster Medium (ICM)**
to be magnetised

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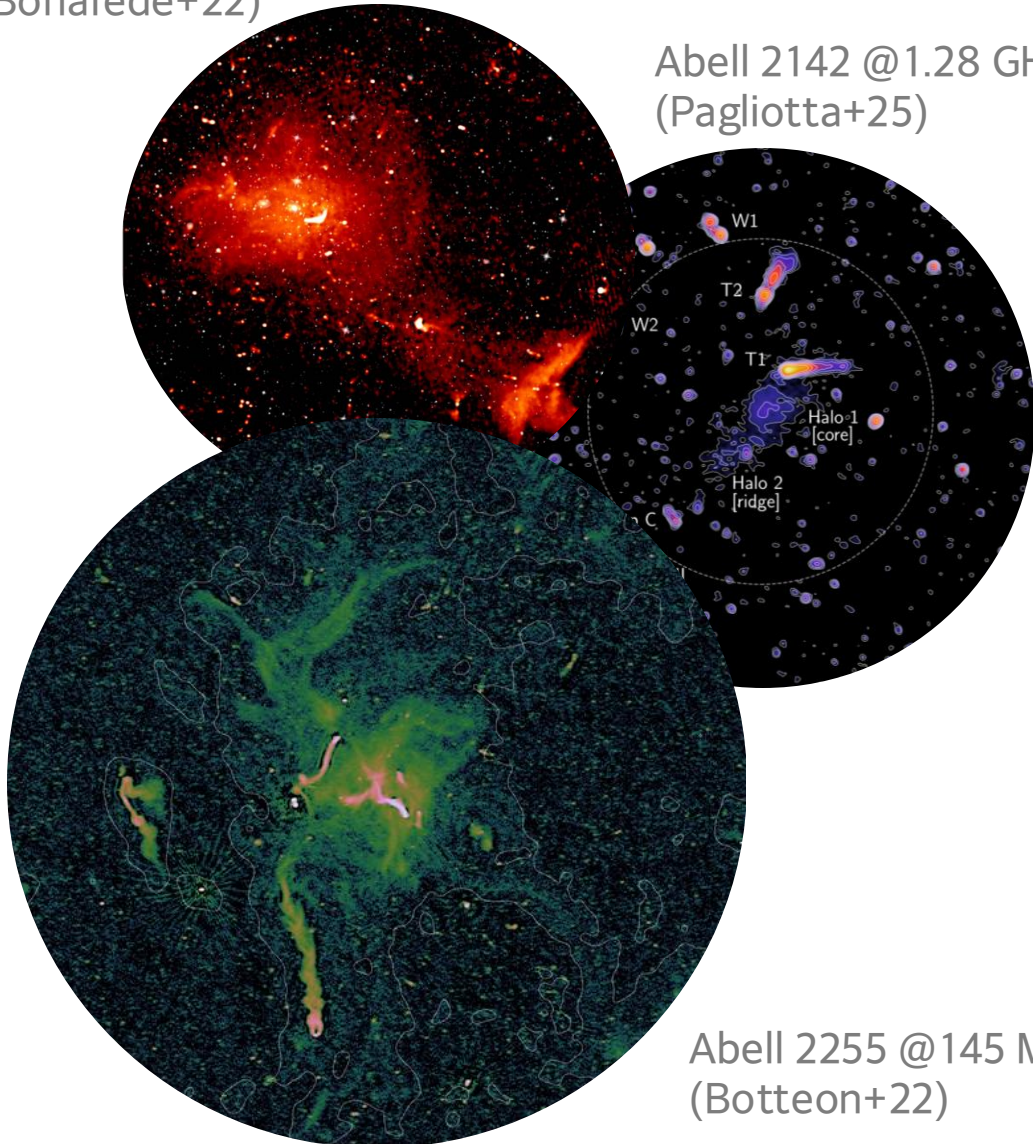
Low redshift

- Limited number of studies (~ 10)
- *Intensity*: 1-12 μG (at the centre)
- *Turbulent* configuration

Coma @144 MHz
(Bonafede+22)

Abell 2142 @1.28 GHz
(Pagliotta+25)

Abell 2255 @145 MHz
(Botteon+22)



1

Origin

Primordial, astrophysical seeds

2

Amplification

Intensity, structure, mechanisms,
timescale

3

Evolution

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Recent studies *favour a primordial origin*
(e.g. Carretti+25)

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Amplification of weak seeds by structure
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(e.g. Steinwandel+22)

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Evolution

High redshift

Galaxy clusters: μG intensity by $z \sim 0.6 - 0.9$;
fast amplification (Di Gennaro+20)

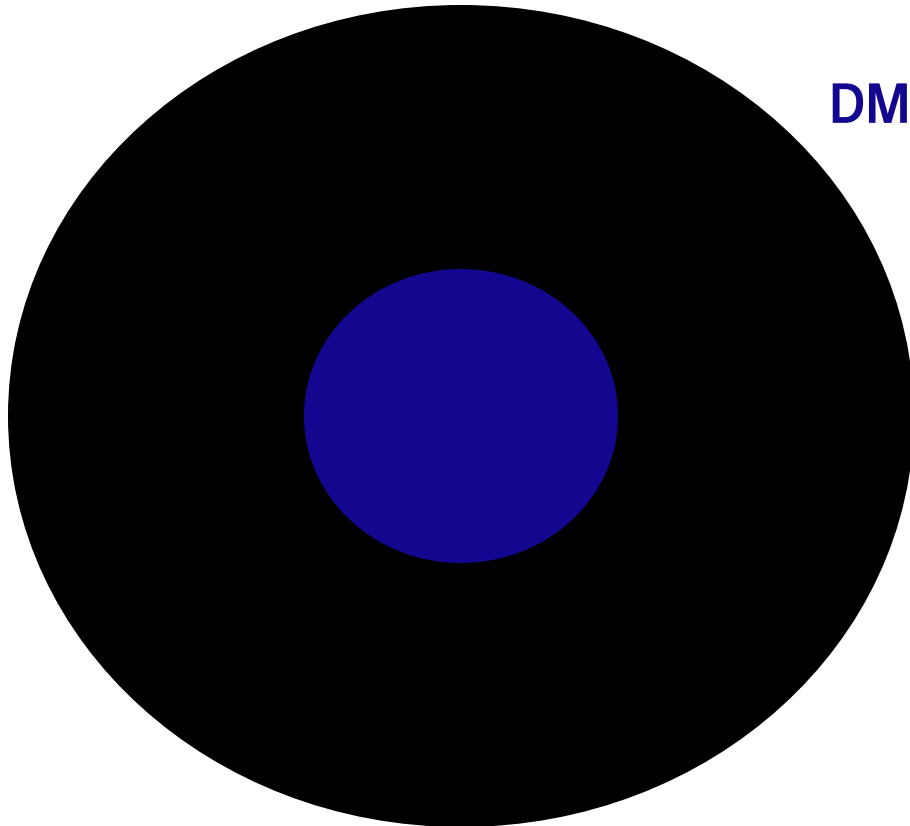
To study the *origin* and the *evolution* of **magnetic fields**, *earlier phases of galaxy clusters* need to be probed, namely

Proto-clusters

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Proto-clusters

DM halo

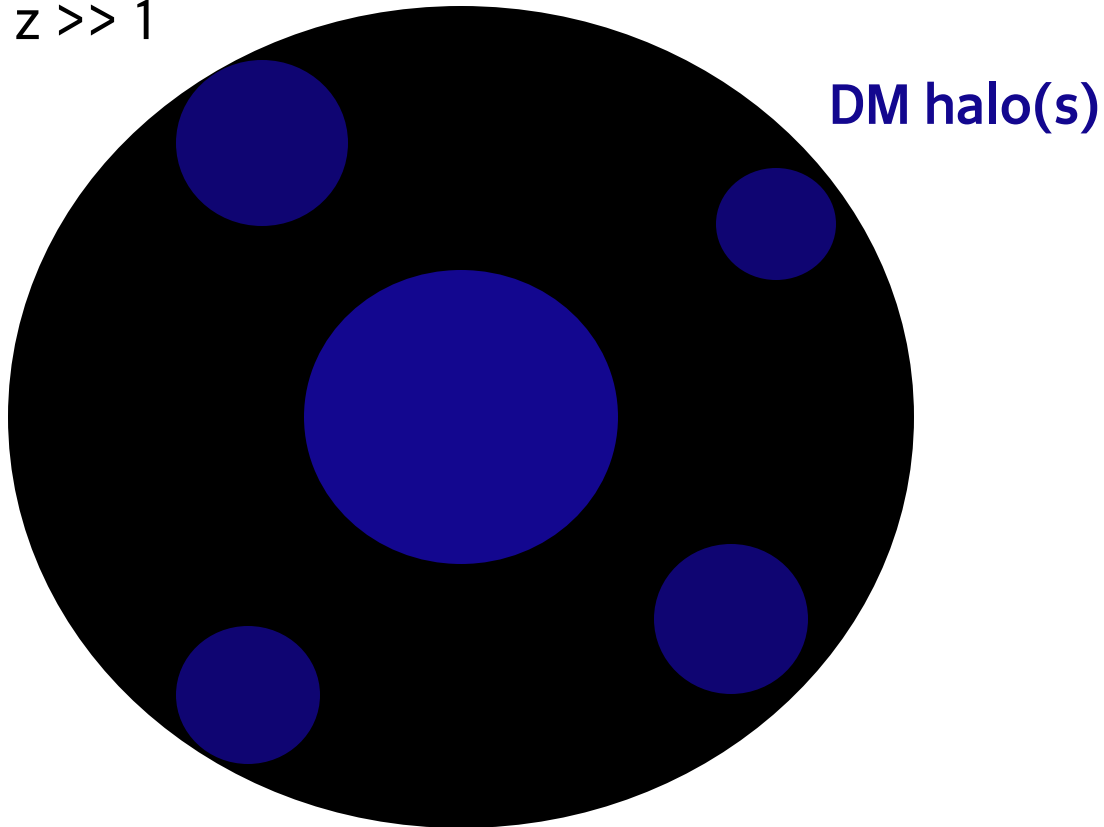


"A proto-cluster is a structure that will, at some stage, collapse into a galaxy cluster." (Overzier+16)

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Proto-clusters

$z \gg 1$

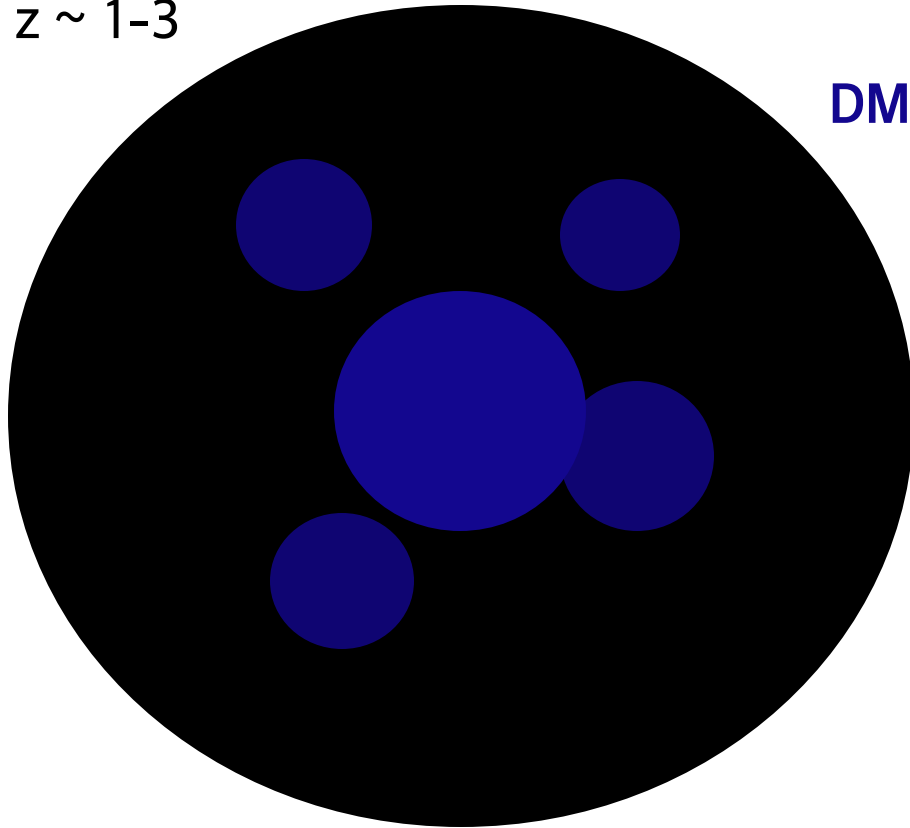


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Proto-clusters

$z \sim 1-3$



DM halo(s)

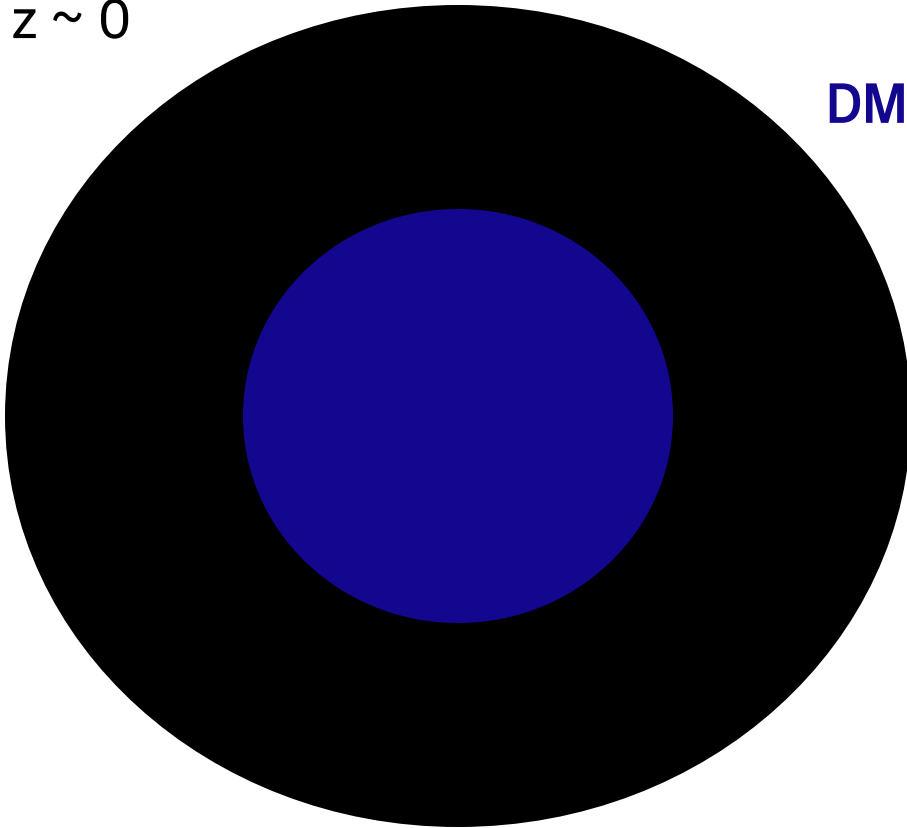
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To study the *origin* and the *evolution* of **magnetic fields**, *earlier phases of galaxy clusters* need to be probed, namely

Proto-clusters

$z \sim 0$

DM halo

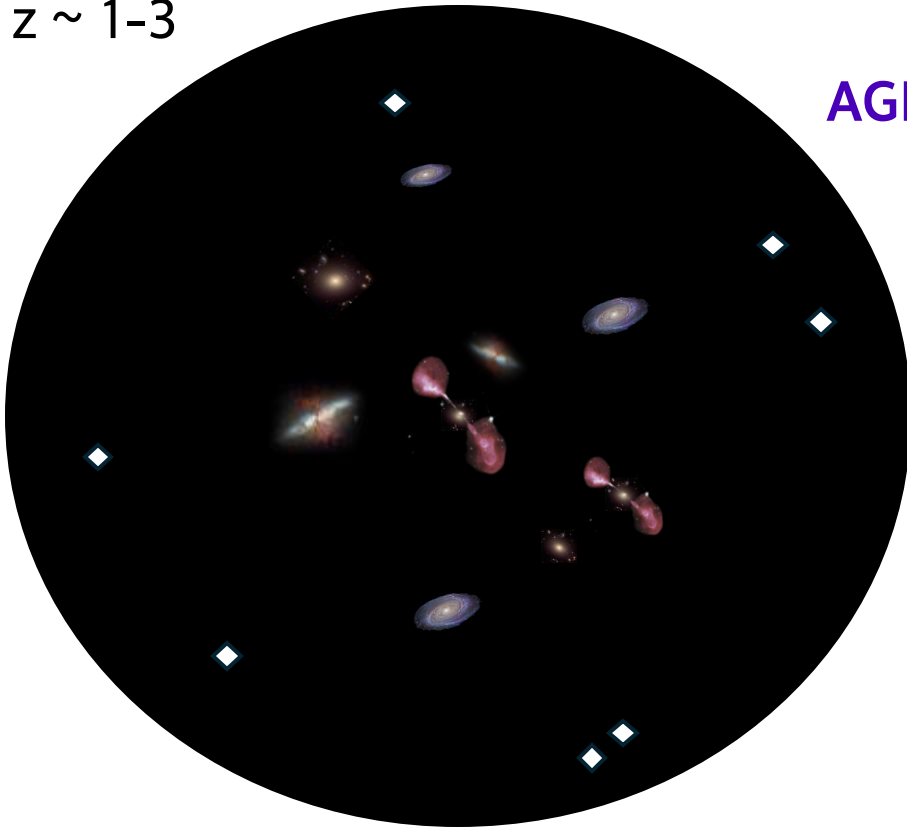


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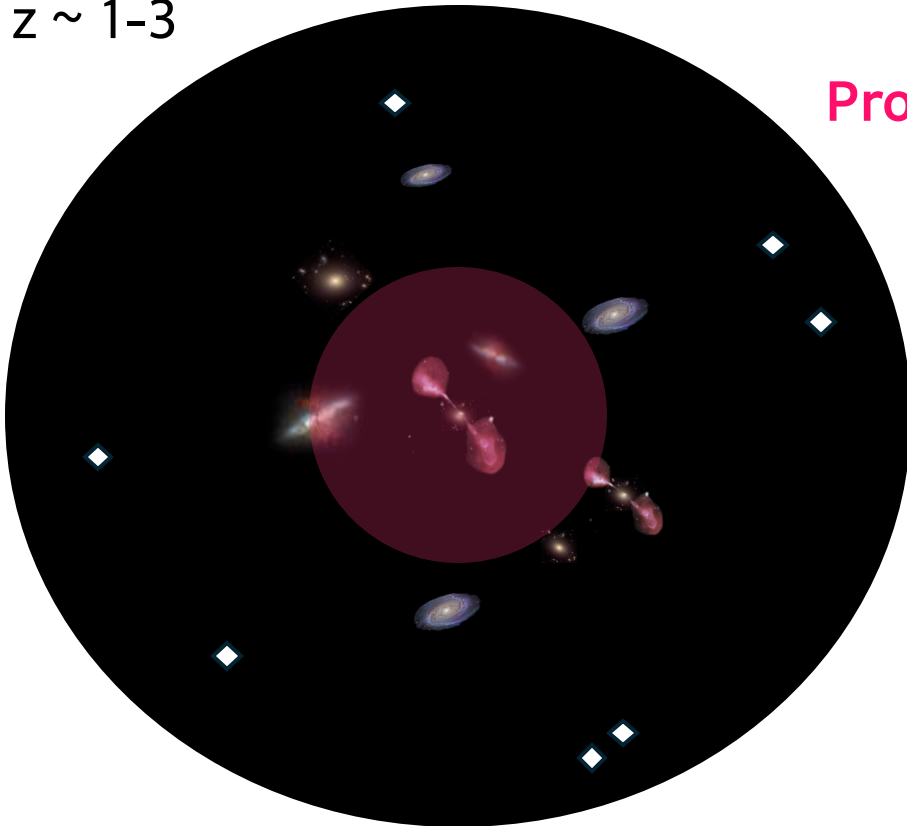
AGN and galaxies

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Proto-clusters

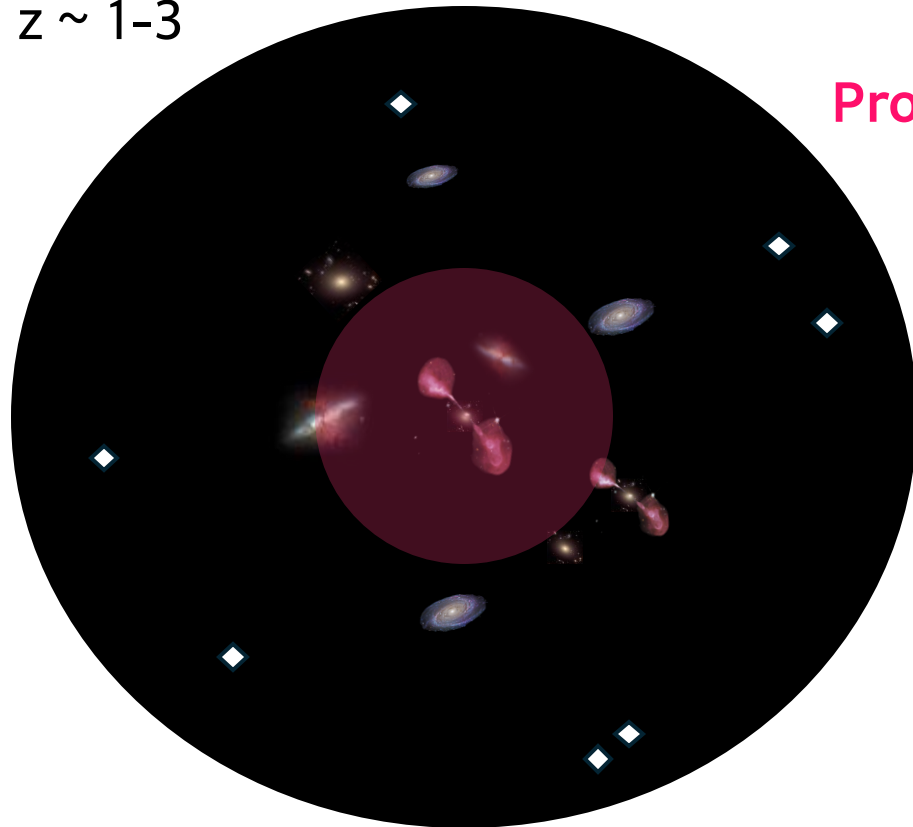
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Proto-ICM

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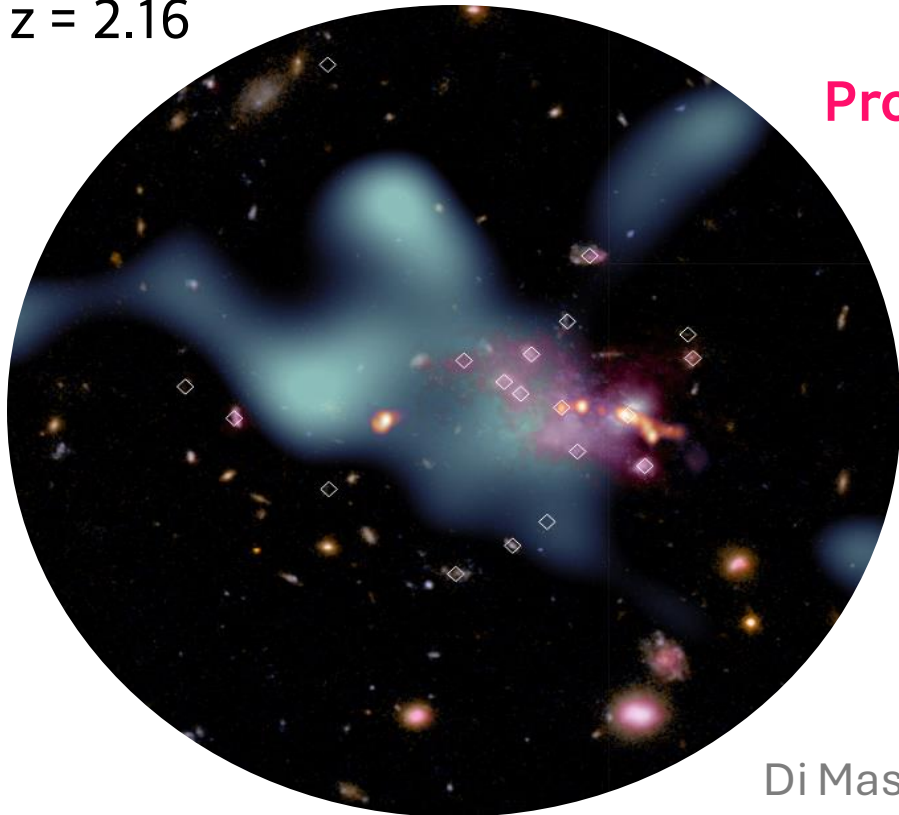


Proto-ICM

- predicted by *simulations* (e.g. Remus+23)

Spiderweb proto-cluster

$z = 2.16$



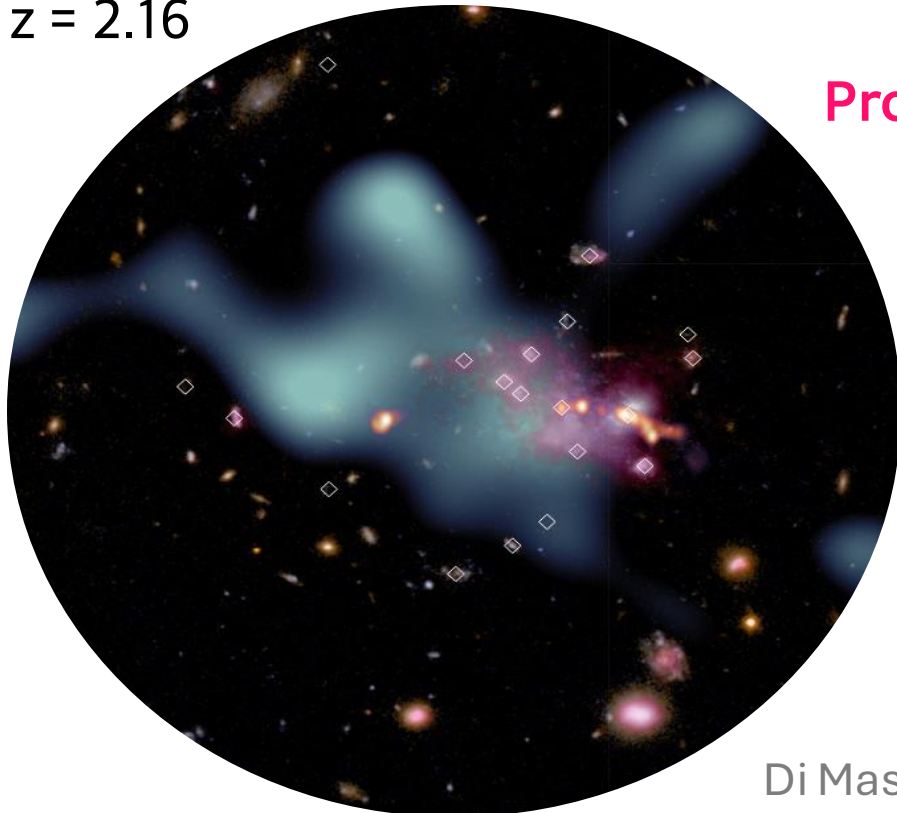
Proto-ICM

Di Mascolo+23

- predicted by *simulations* (e.g. Remus+23)
- *observations*: **X-ray** (Tozzi+22, Lepore+24) and **Sunyaev-Zeldovich** (Di Mascolo+23) thermal gas in the **Spiderweb proto-cluster**

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Proto-ICM

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To date, only magnetic field estimate
in the proto-ICM

$B < 1 \mu\text{G}$

Anderson+22

Key questions to answer

1

Level of
amplification and
structure of
magnetic fields
in the proto-ICM

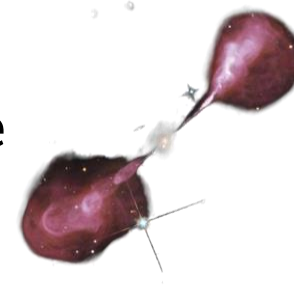
2

Contribution of
astrophysical sources
(e.g., AGN) to the
magnetisation

First systematic study in 9 *proto-clusters* ($1.37 < z < 2.80$) of the

ClusterAroundRadioLoudAGN survey (Wylezalek+13,+14) (CARLA)

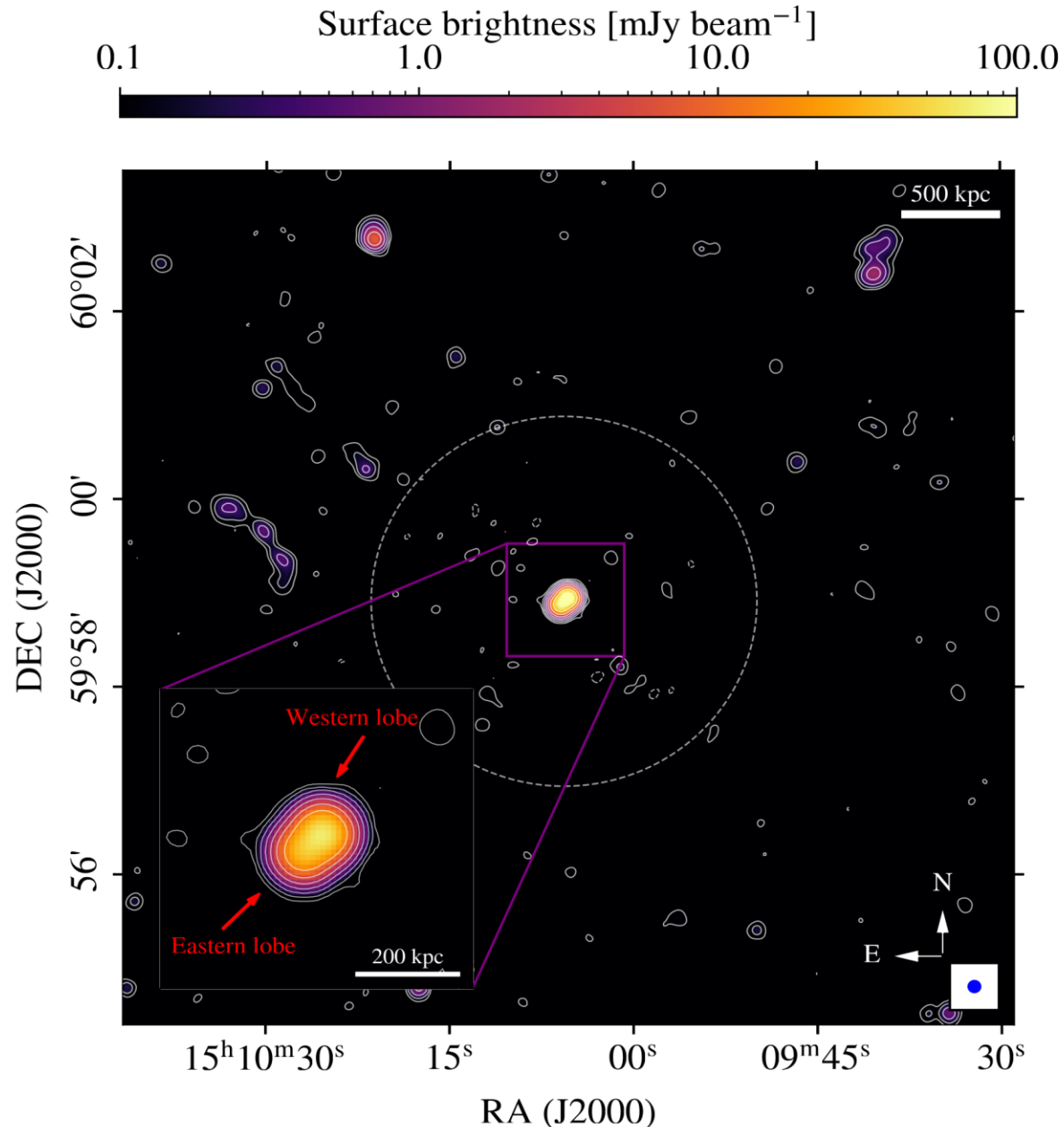
1 strongly polarised radio-loud AGN at the centre



2 spectroscopically confirmed (Noirot+18)

3 Very Large Array (VLA) L-band (1-2 GHz)



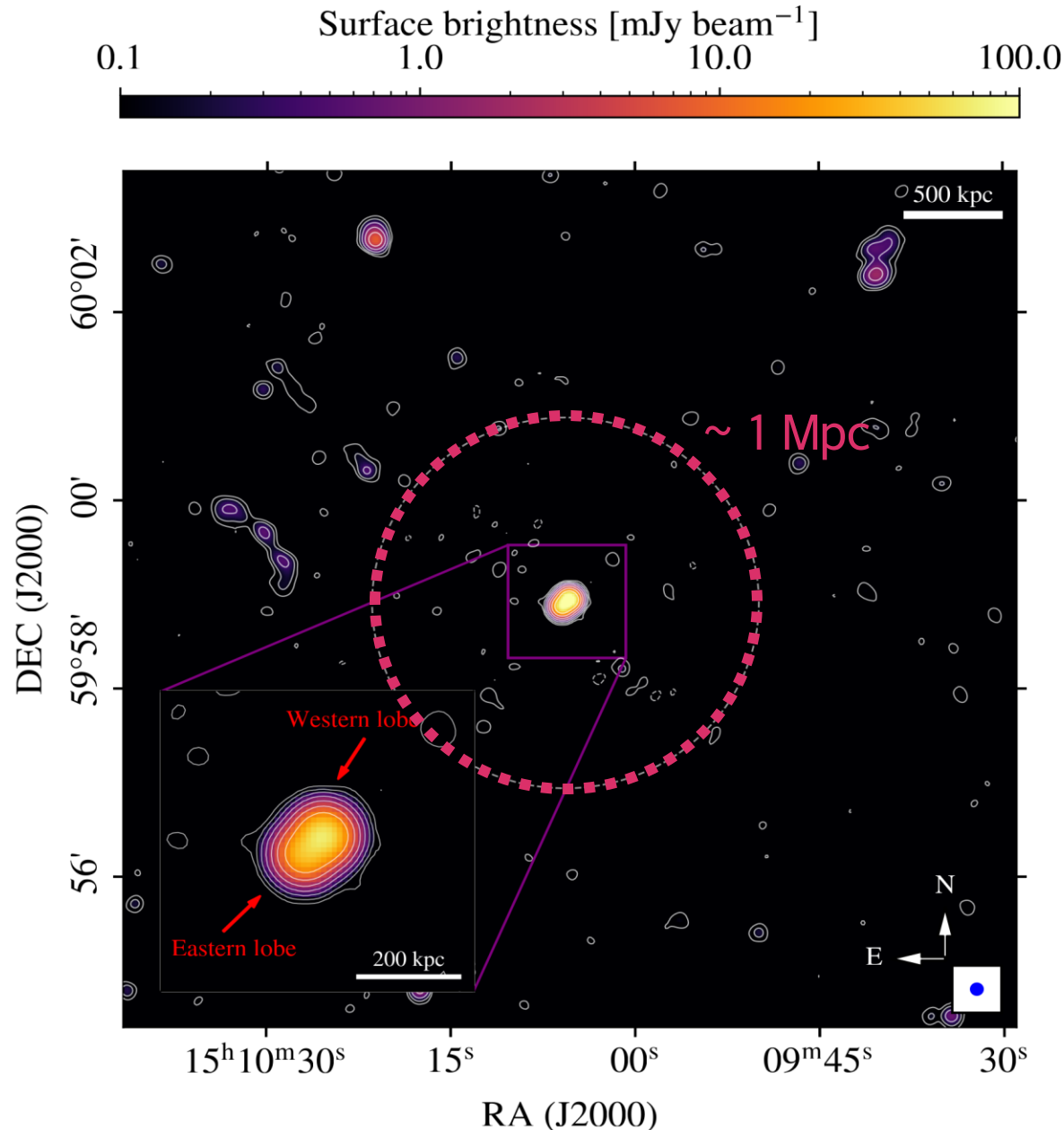


CARLA J1510+5958 (Pagliotta et al., in prep.)

- $z = 1.72$
- $\text{Log}_{10} M_{\text{halo}} = 14.2$ (Mei+23)
- *Spec. Conf. Members* = 6 (Noirot+18)

Stokes I MFS image at 1.5 GHz

Restoring beam of 7" × 7" (~ 59 kpc)



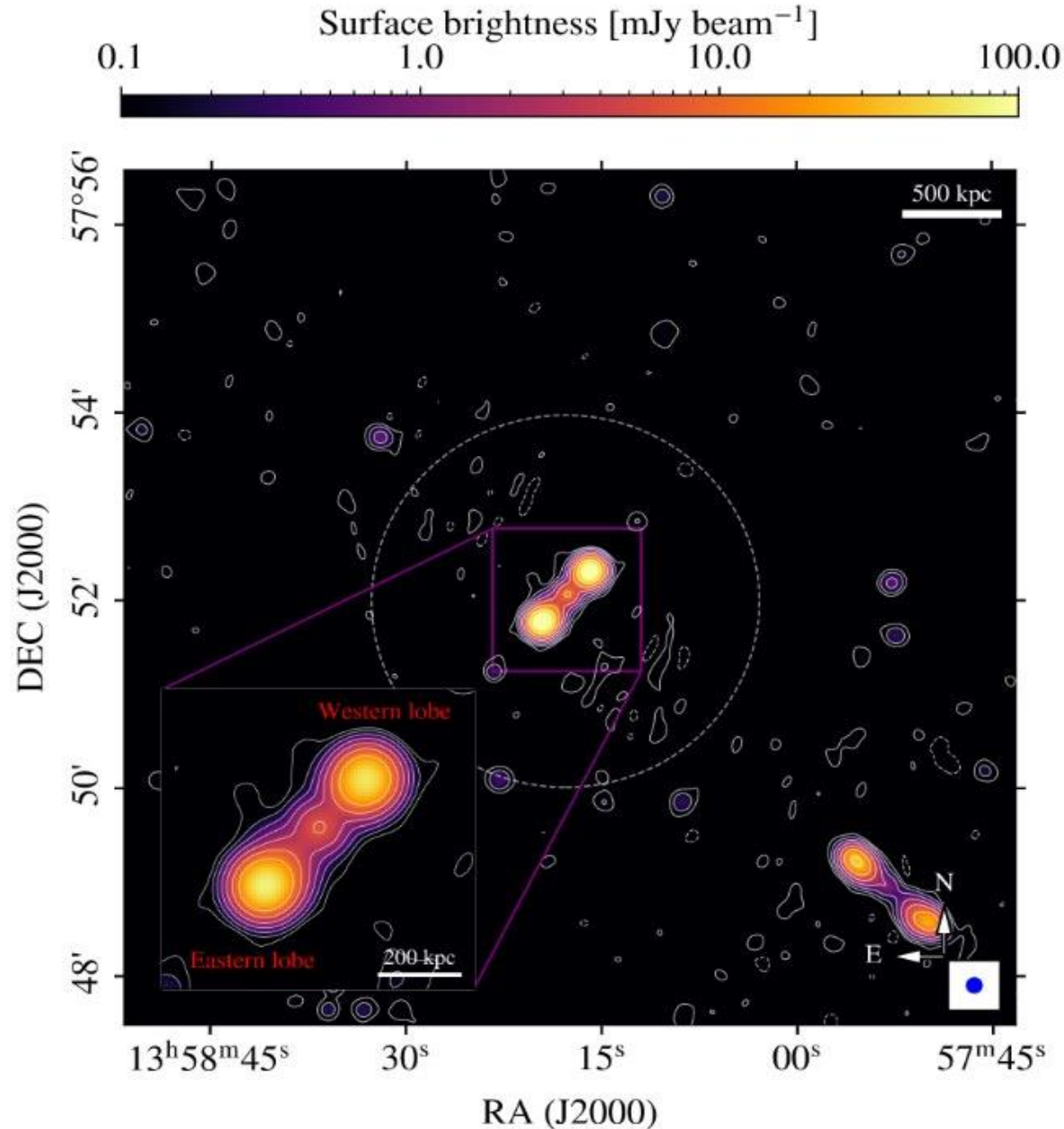
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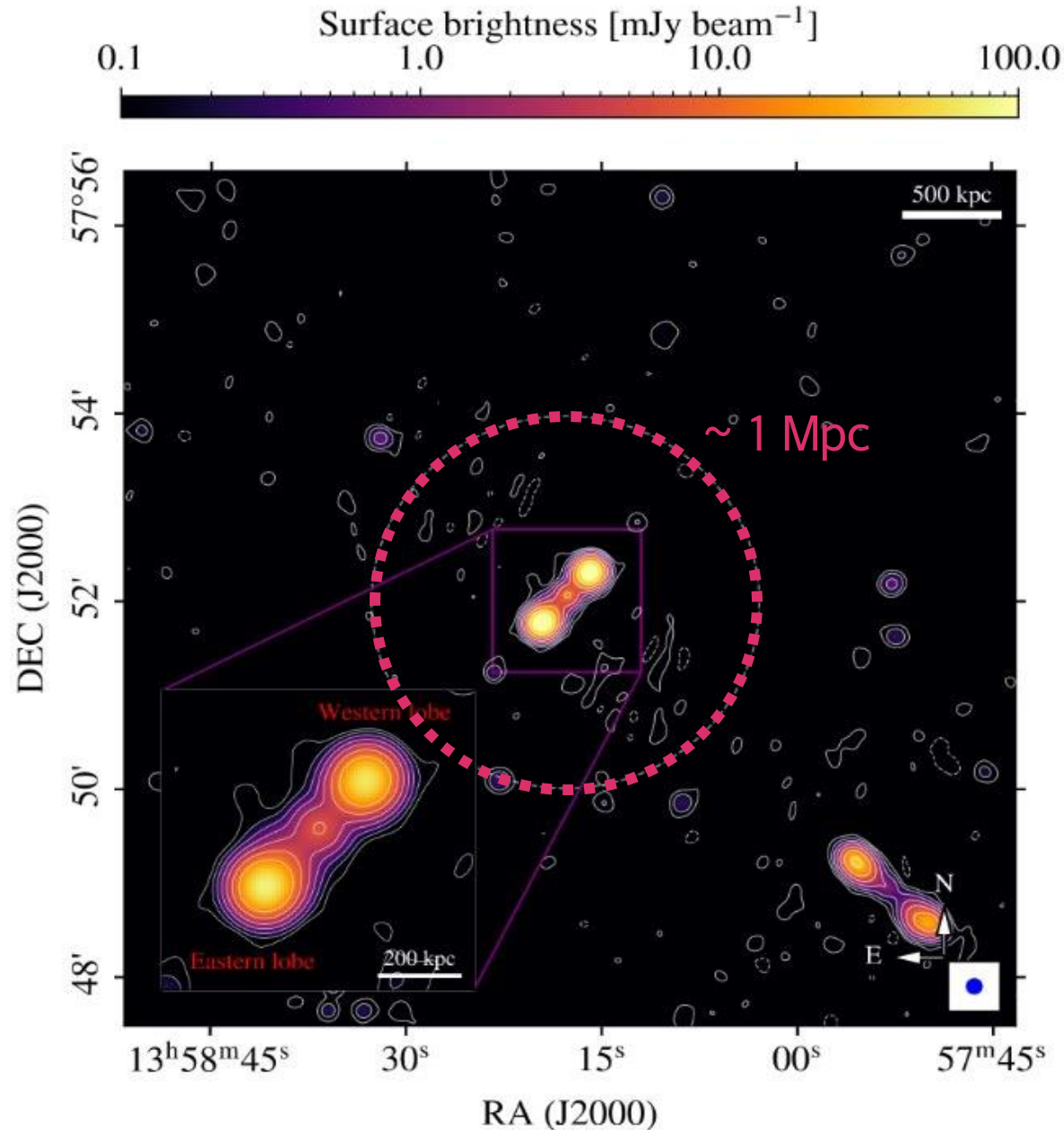


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General approach

1

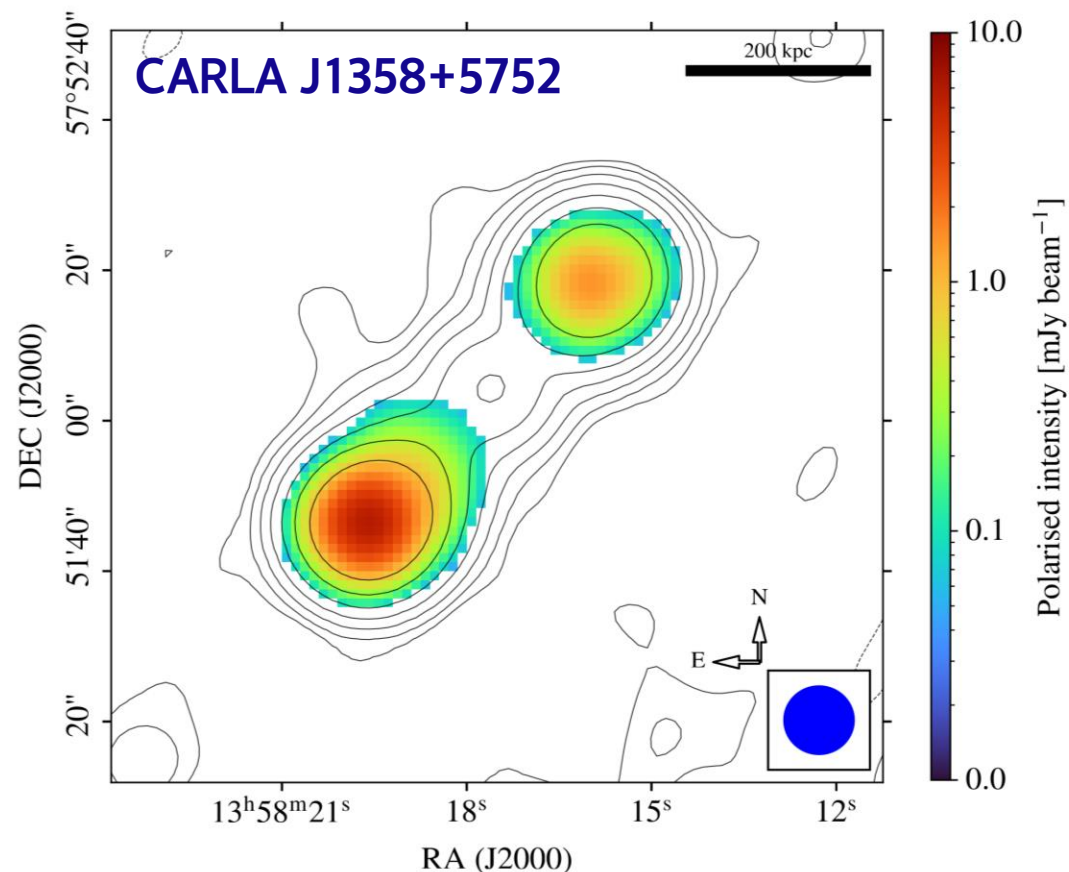
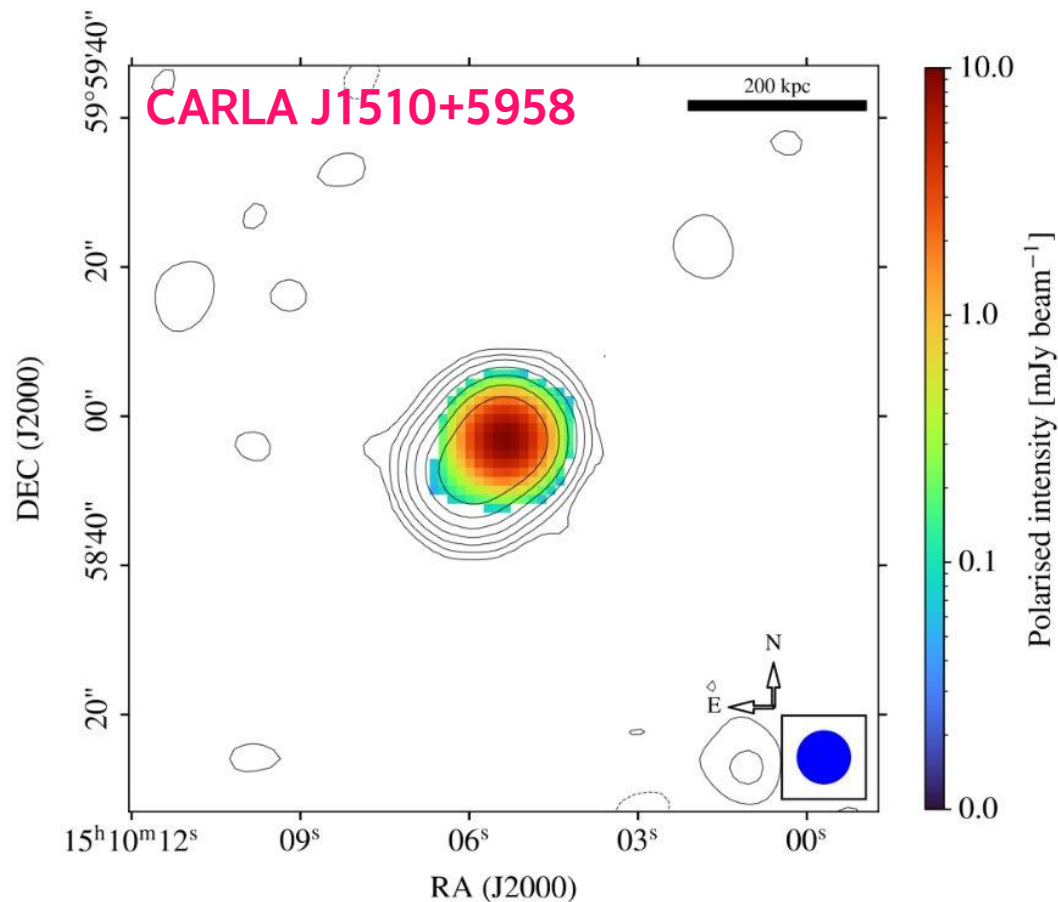
Study the
polarisation and *RM*
properties through
the **RM synthesis**
technique

2

Constrain the *magnetic*
field intensity and
structure through the
comparison with
simulations

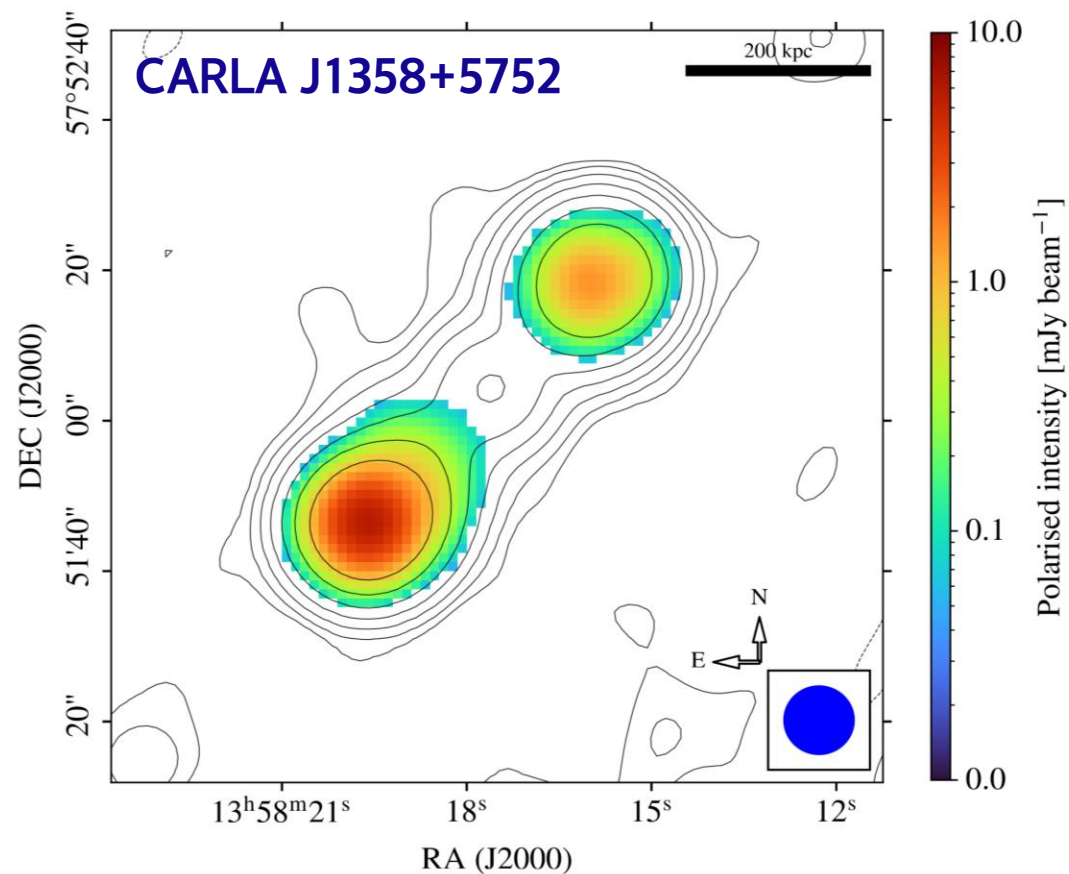
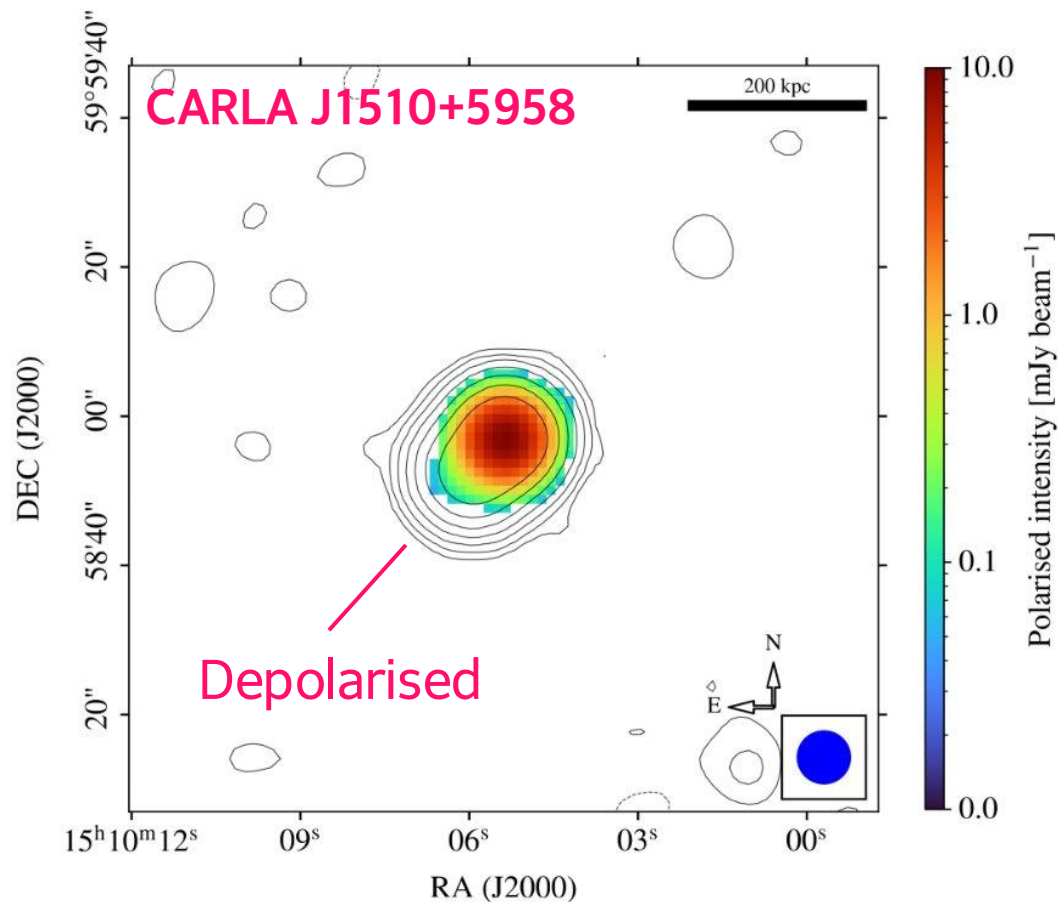
$$\text{RM} = 812 \int_{z_s}^0 \frac{n_e(z)_{[cm^{-3}]} B_{\parallel}(z)_{[\mu G]} dl_{[kpc]}}{(1+z)^2} \frac{dz}{dz} \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

Maximum polarised intensity + *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz



(only pixels above $6\sigma_p$ are shown)

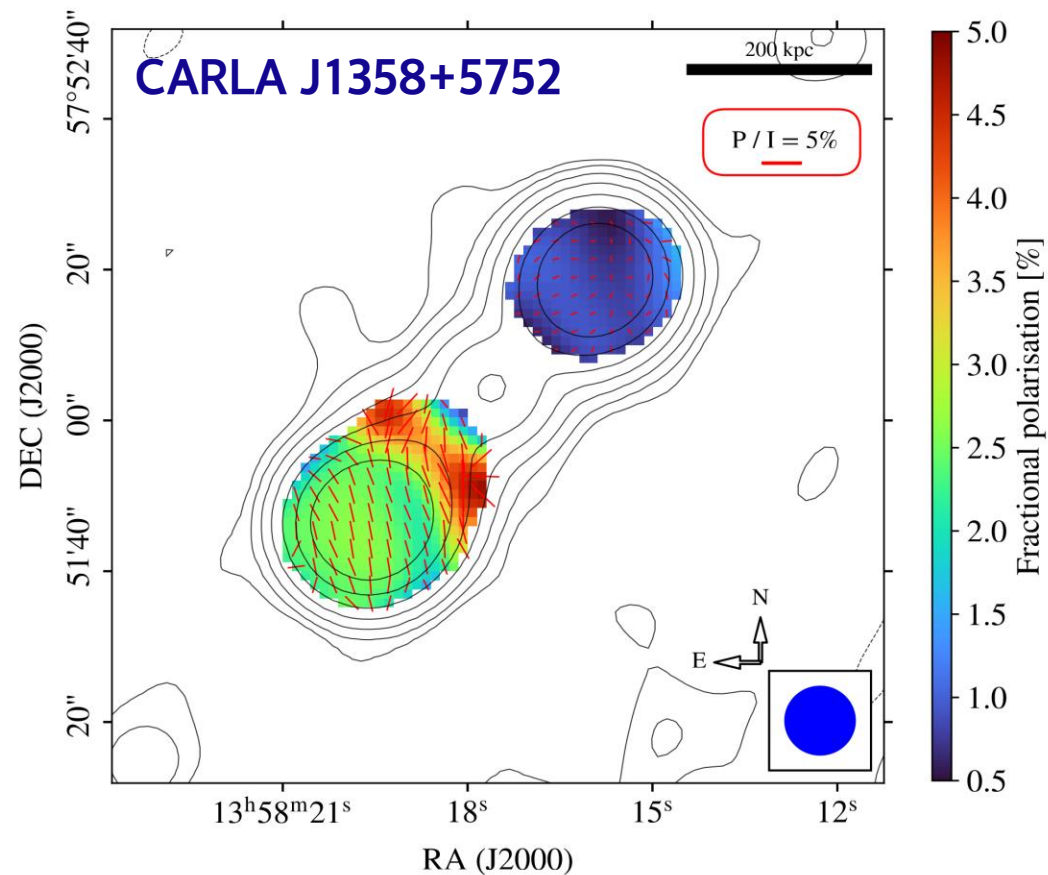
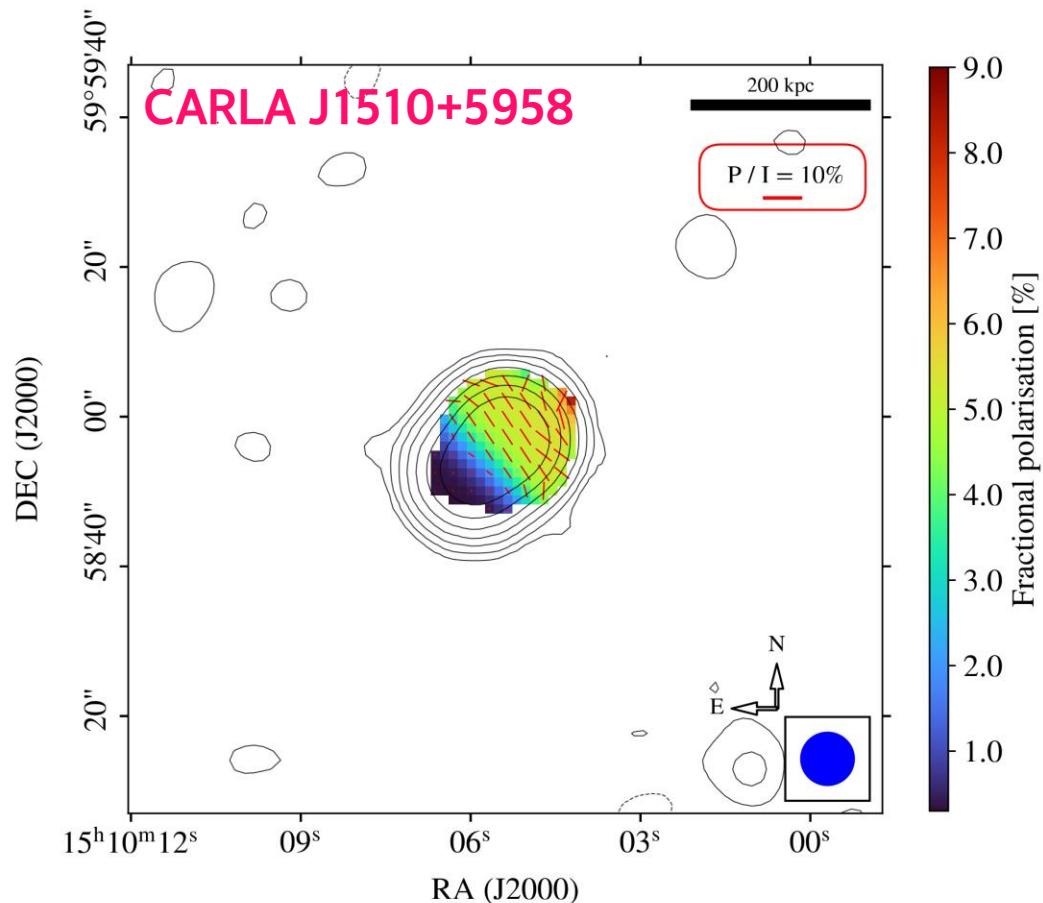
Maximum polarised intensity + *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz



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Polarisation Fraction

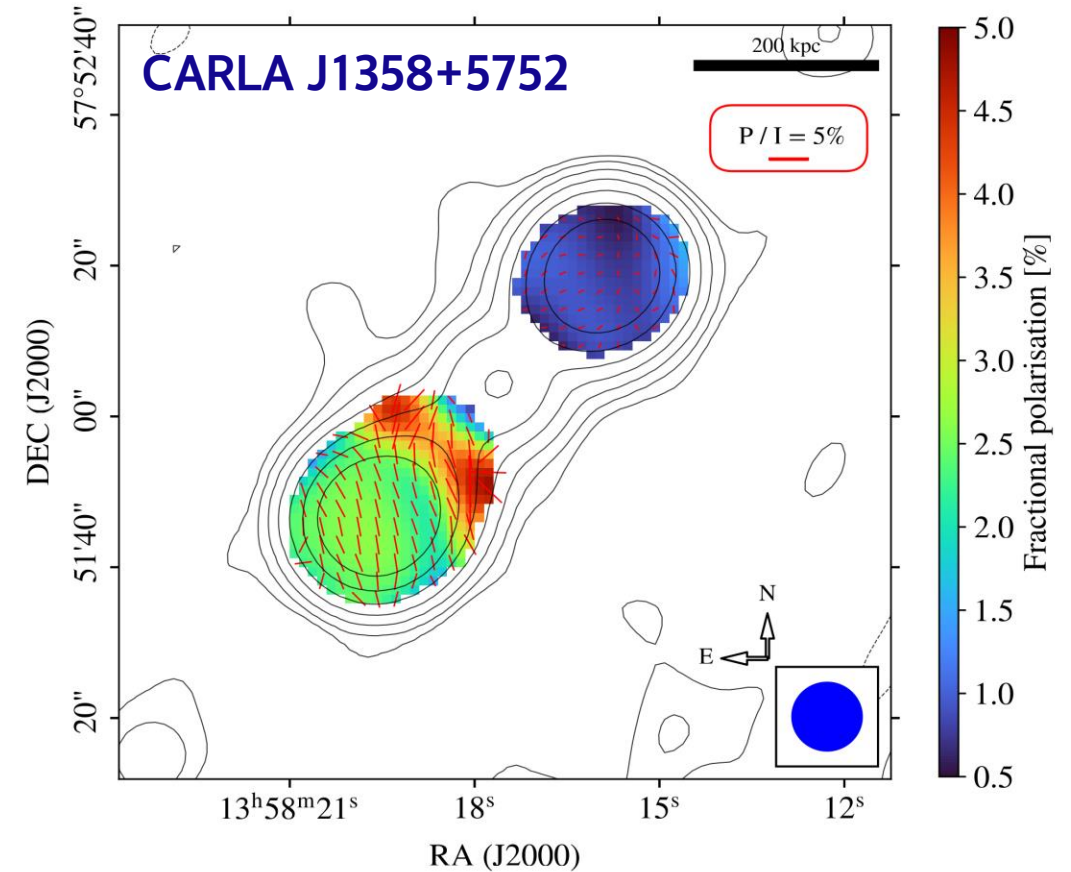
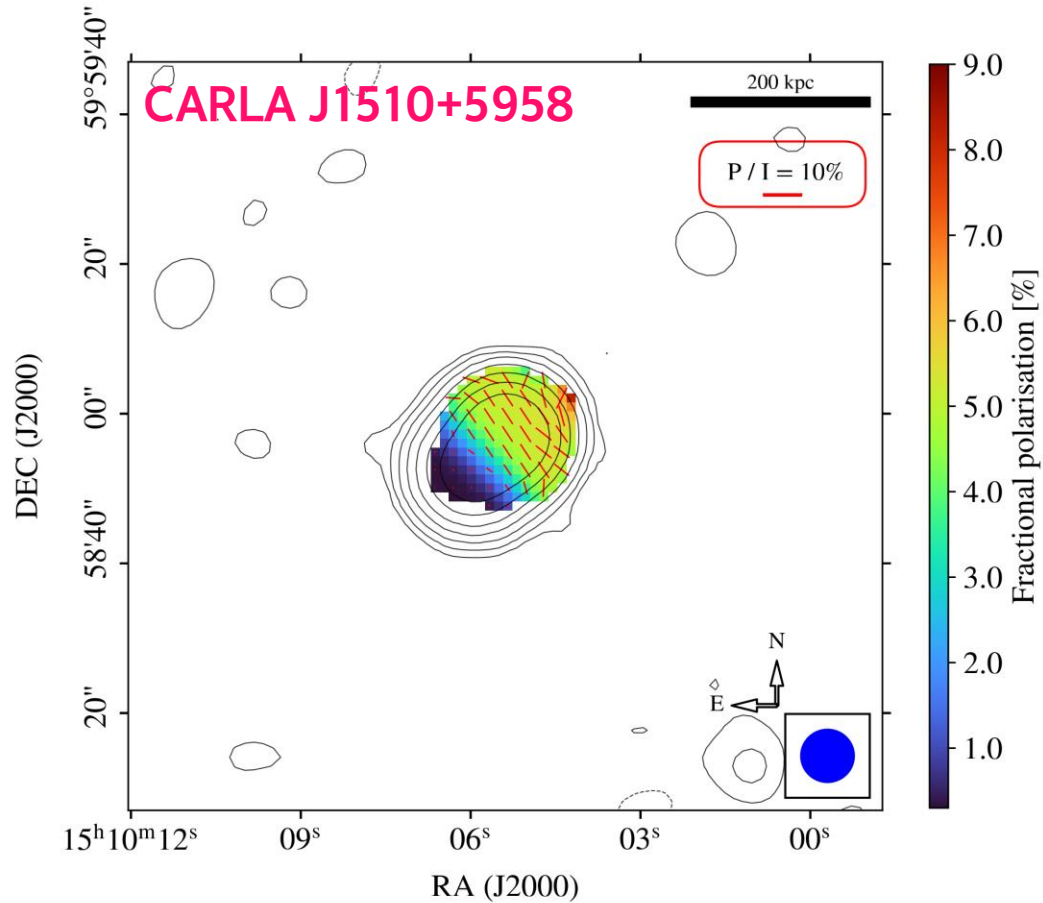
+ *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz



(only pixels above $6\sigma_p$ are shown)

Polarisation Fraction

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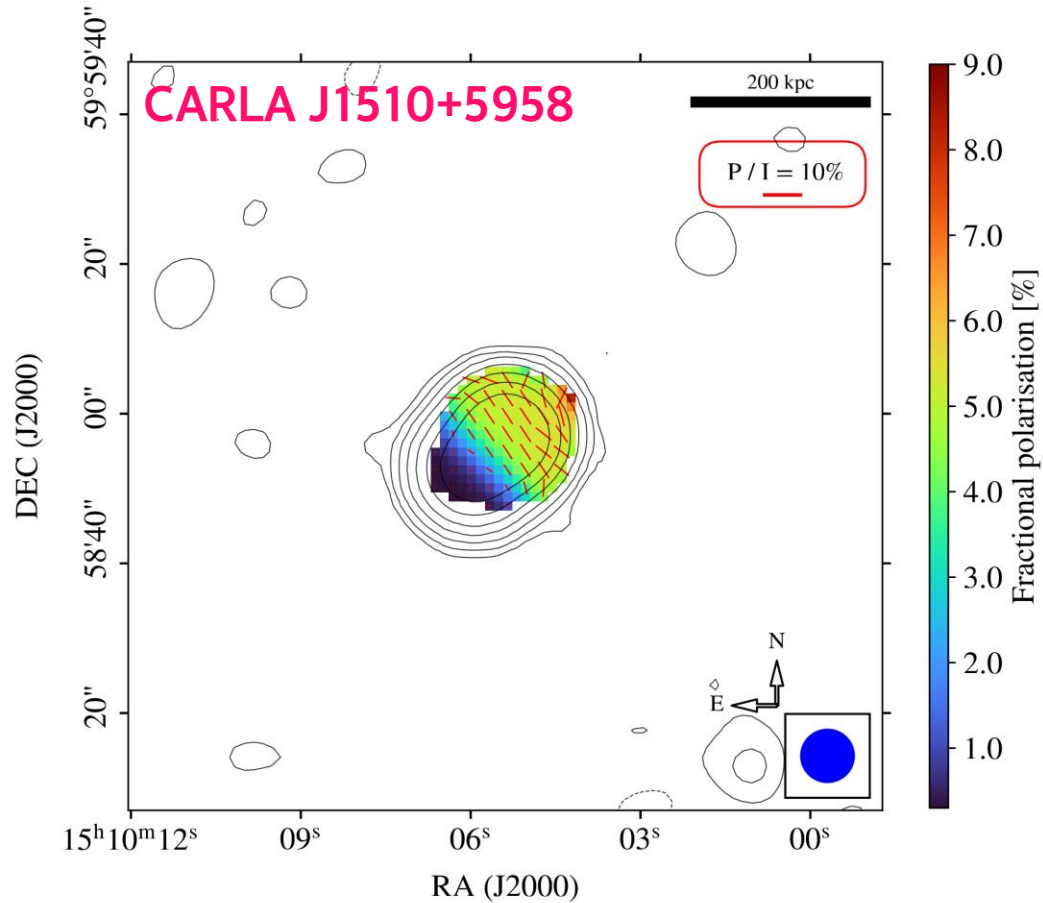


$$0.3 \% < F_p < 8.2 \%$$

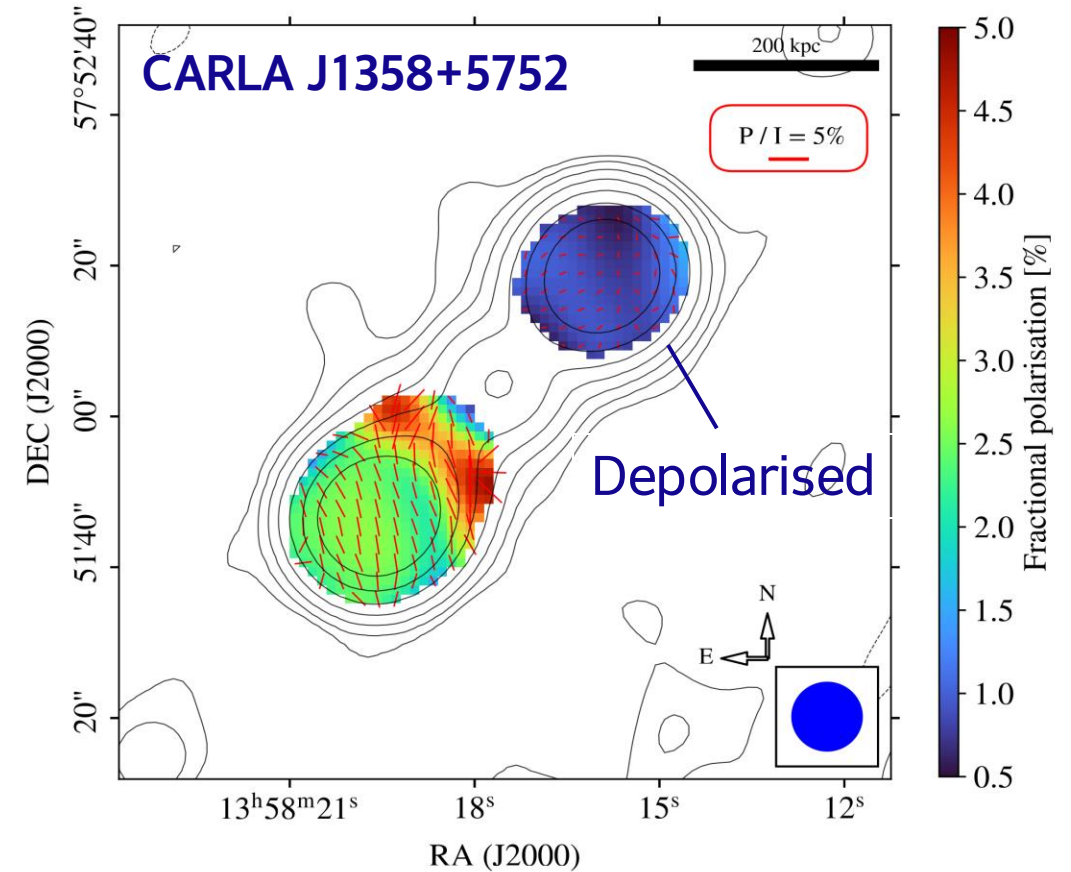
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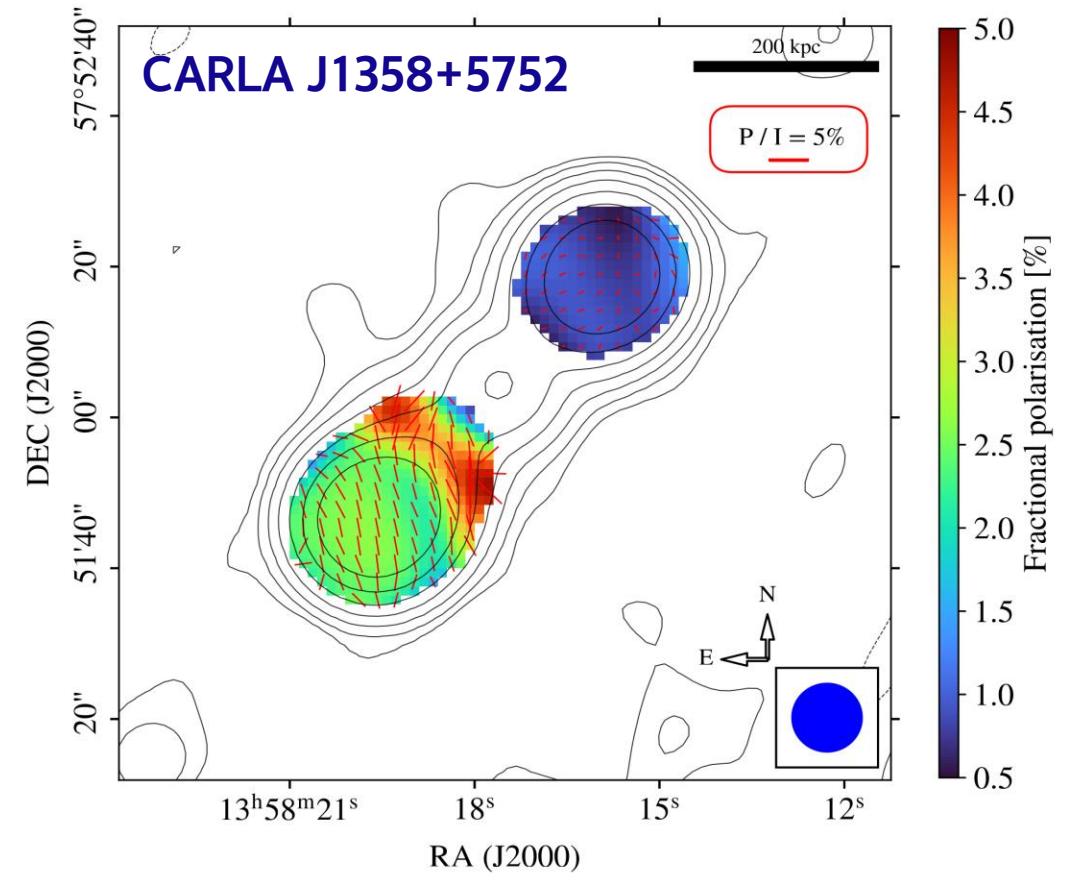
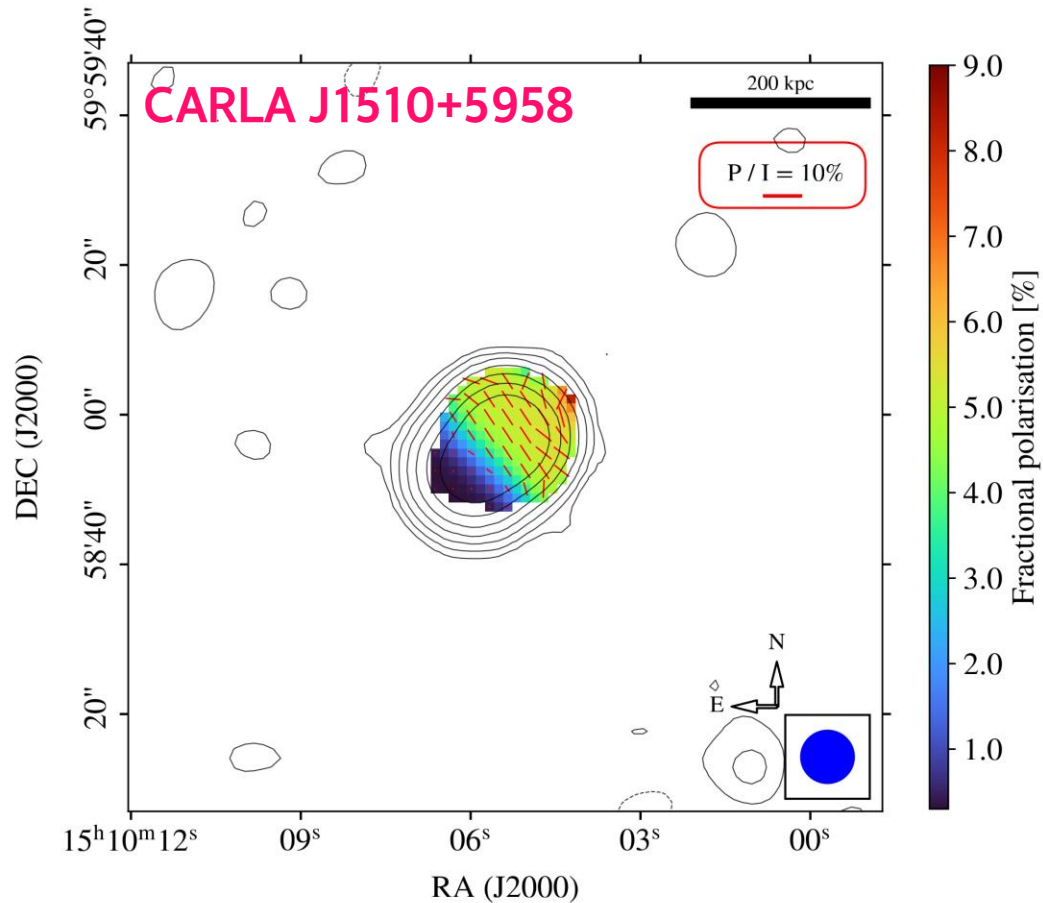


$$0.6 \% < F_p < 4.8 \%$$

(only pixels above $6\sigma_p$ are shown)

Polarisation Fraction

+ *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz

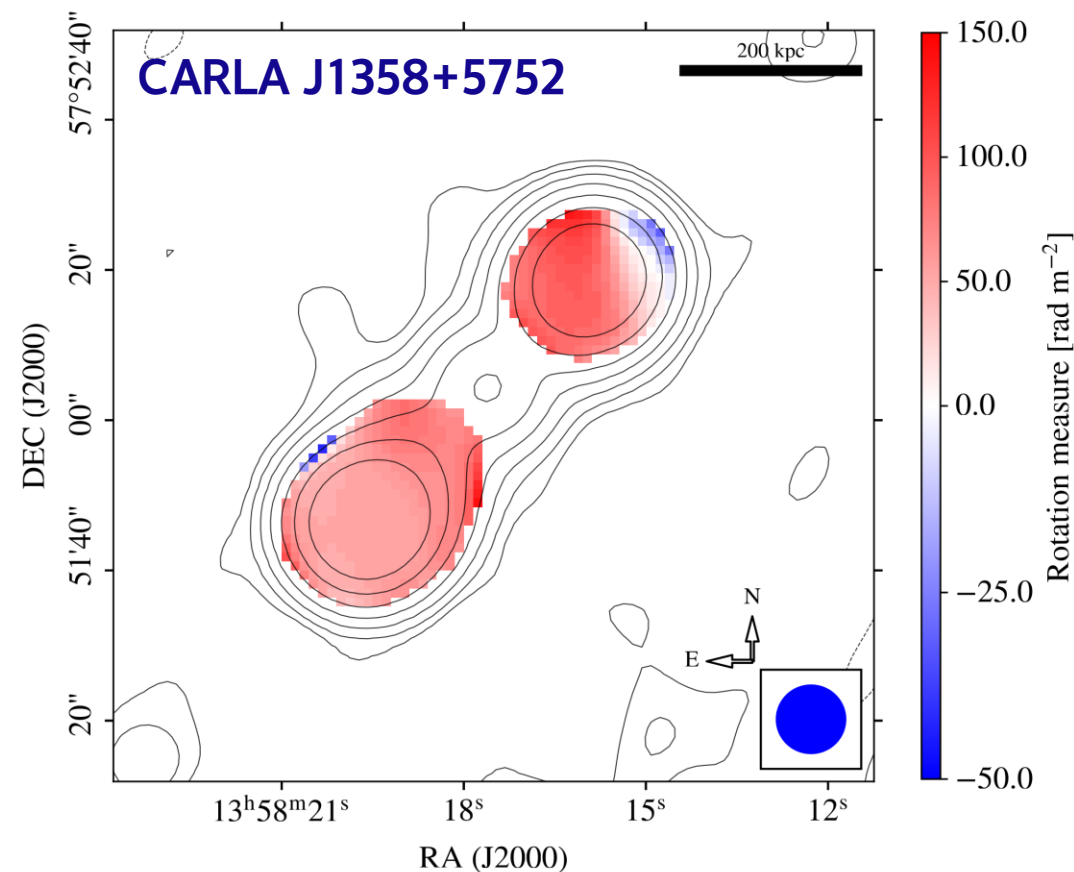
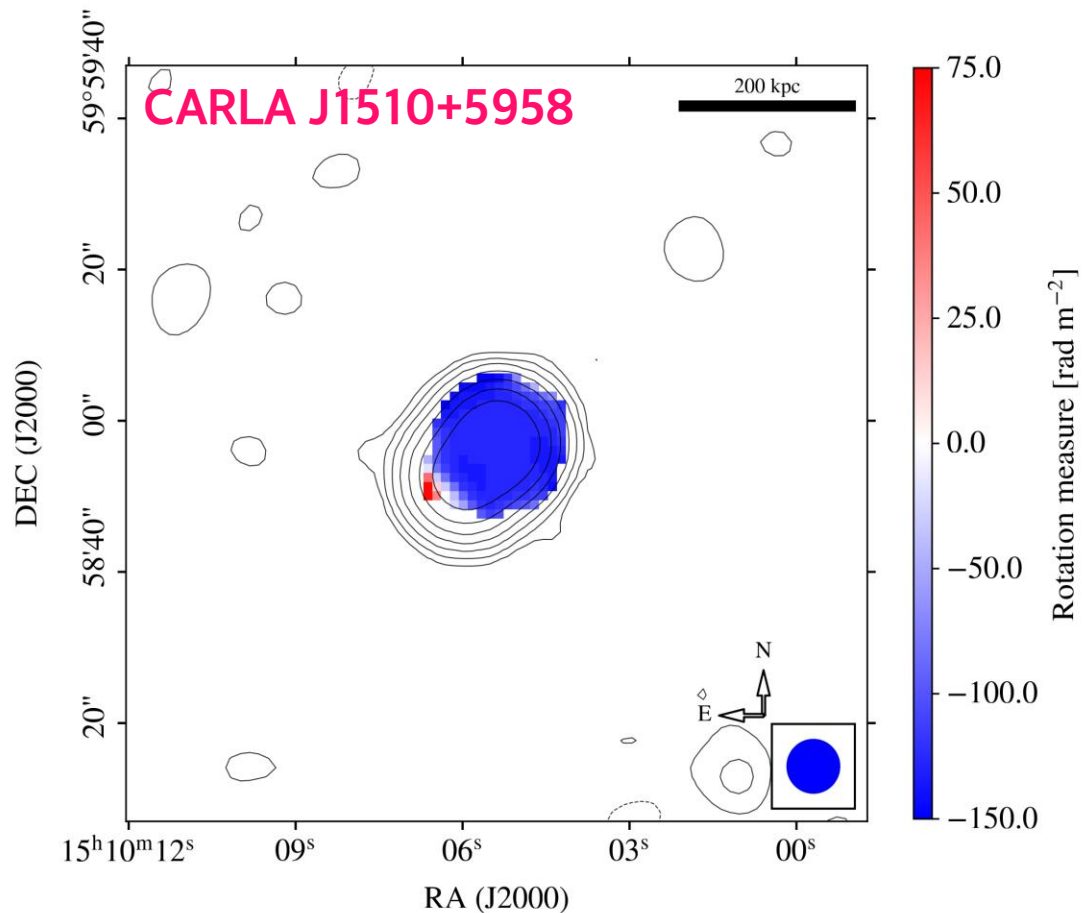


— Projected magnetic field vectors

(only pixels above $6\sigma_p$ are shown)

Rotation Measure

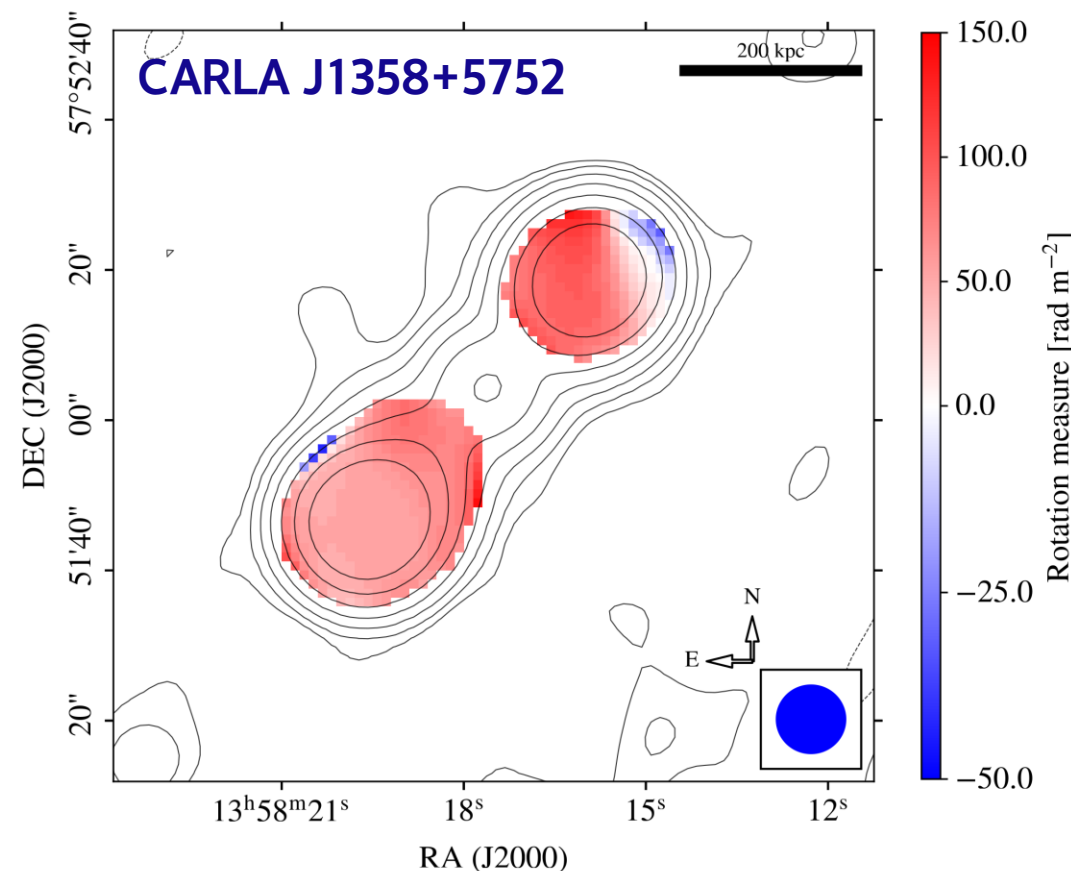
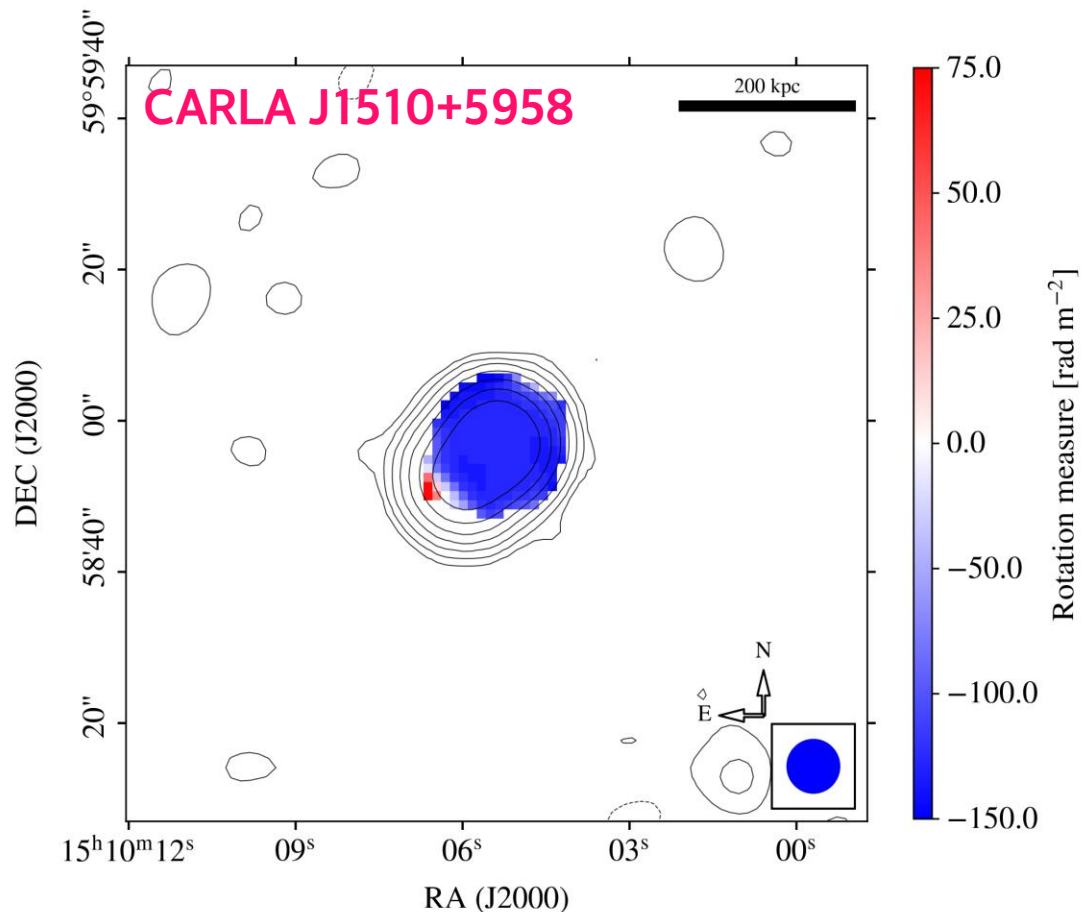
+ *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz



(only pixels above $6\sigma_p$ are shown)

Rotation Measure

+ *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz

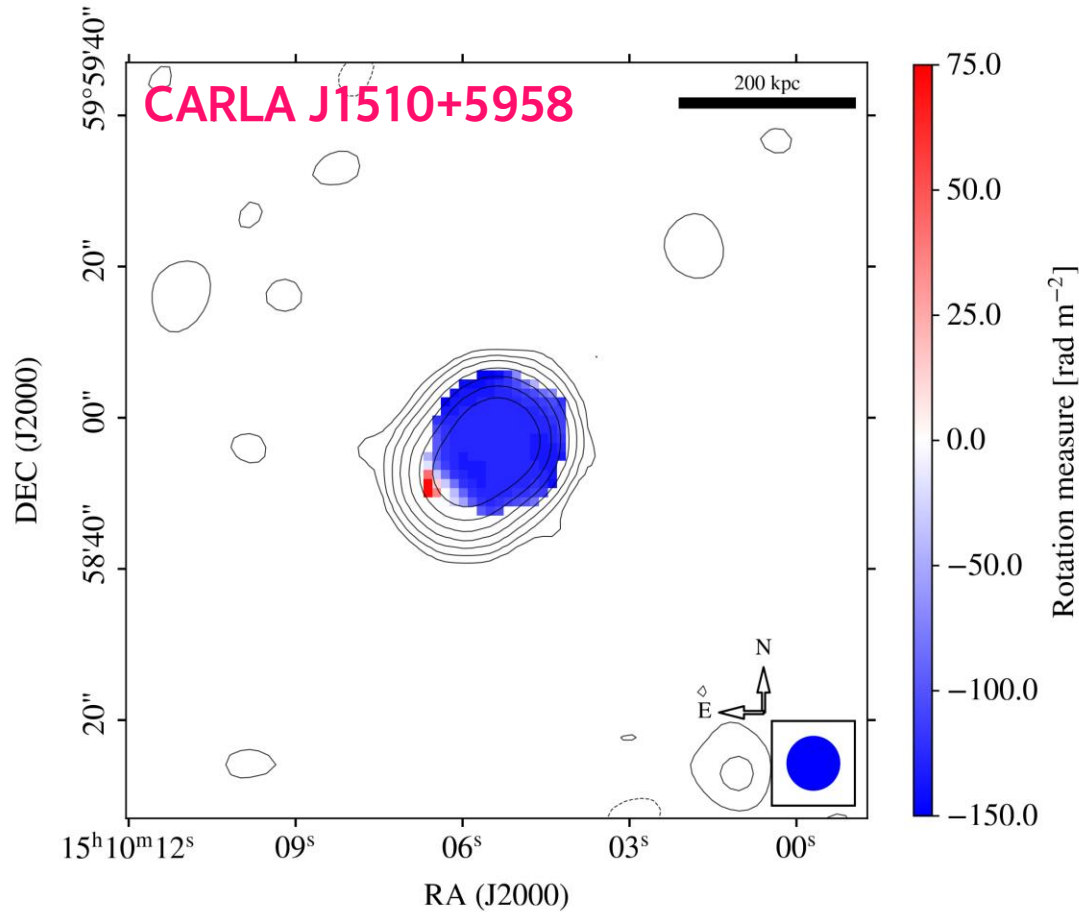


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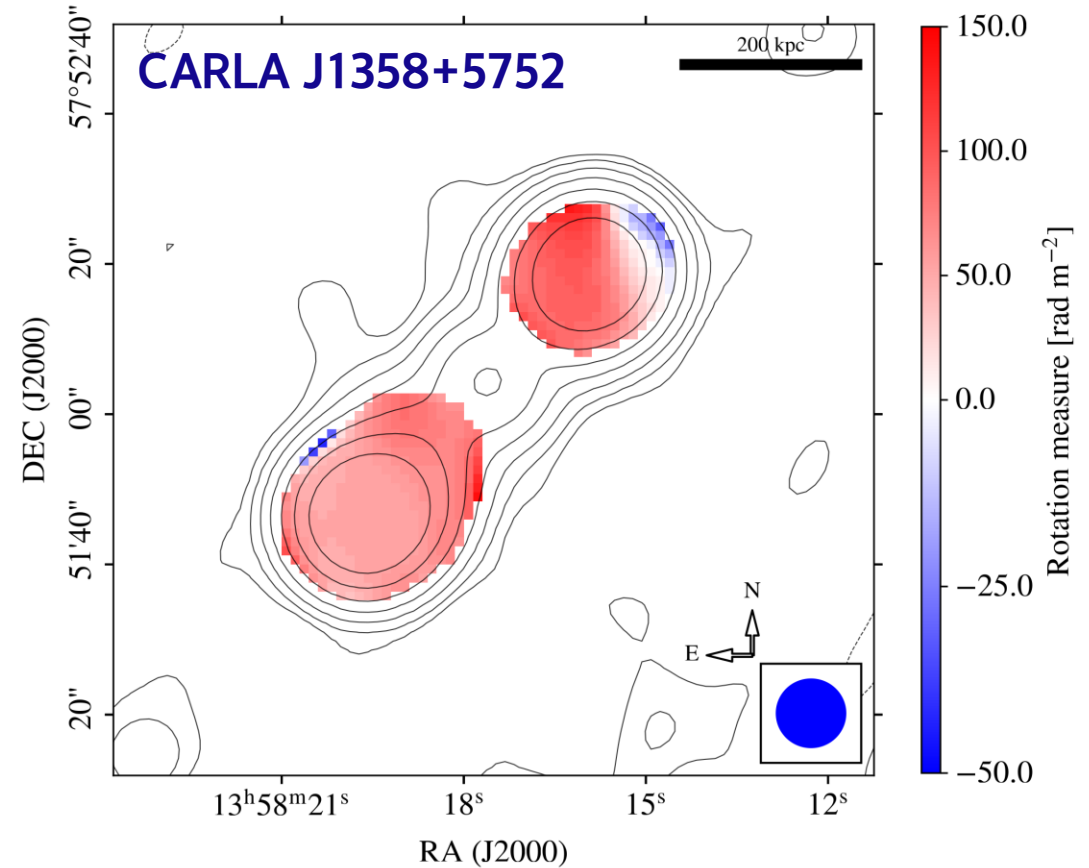
$$-150 \text{ rad m}^{-2} < \text{RM} < +72 \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

Rotation Measure

+ *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz



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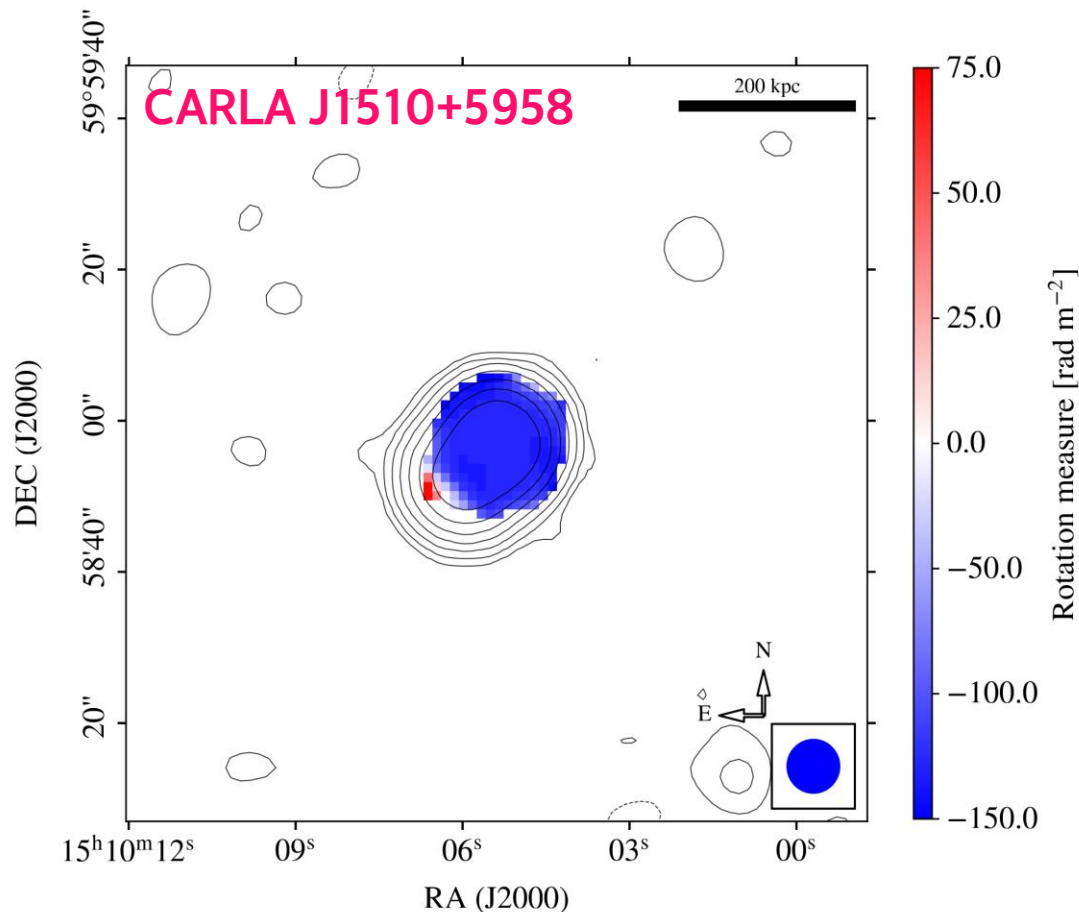


$$-43 \text{ rad m}^{-2} < \text{RM} < +143 \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

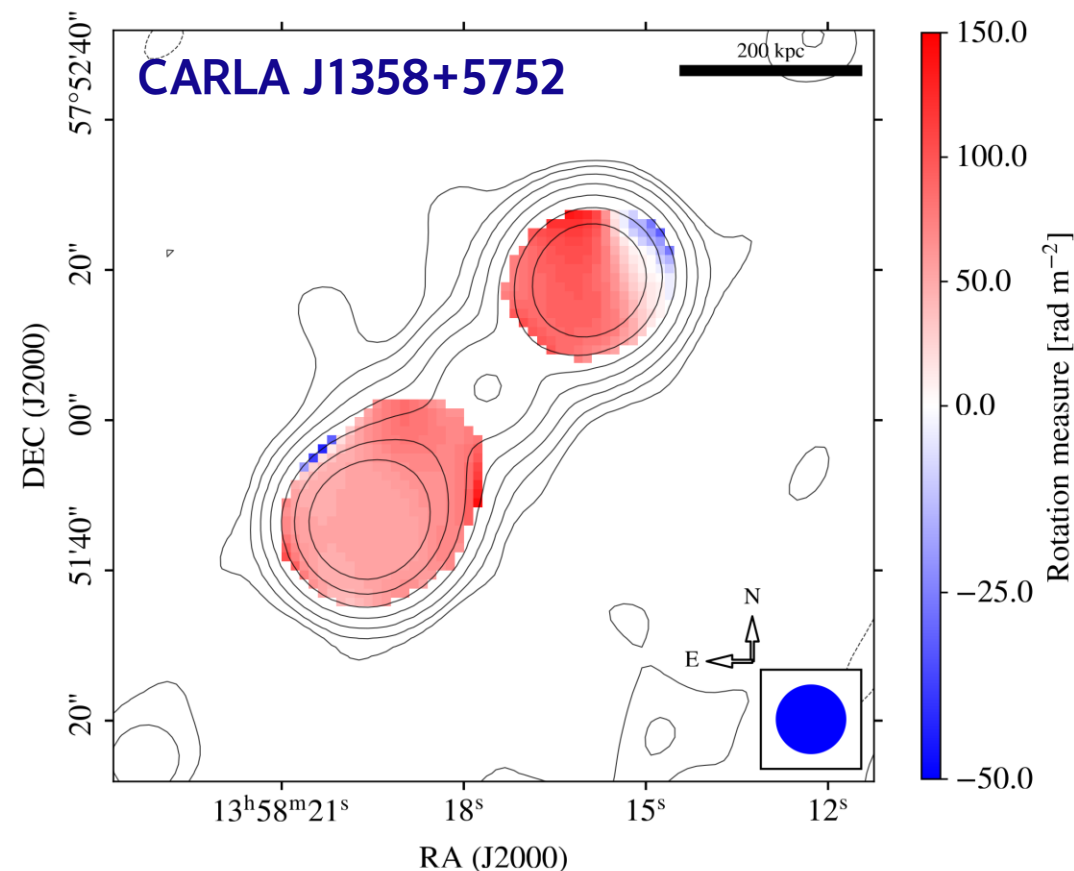
(only pixels above $6\sigma_p$ are shown)

Rotation Measure

+ *total intensity contours* at 1.5 GHz



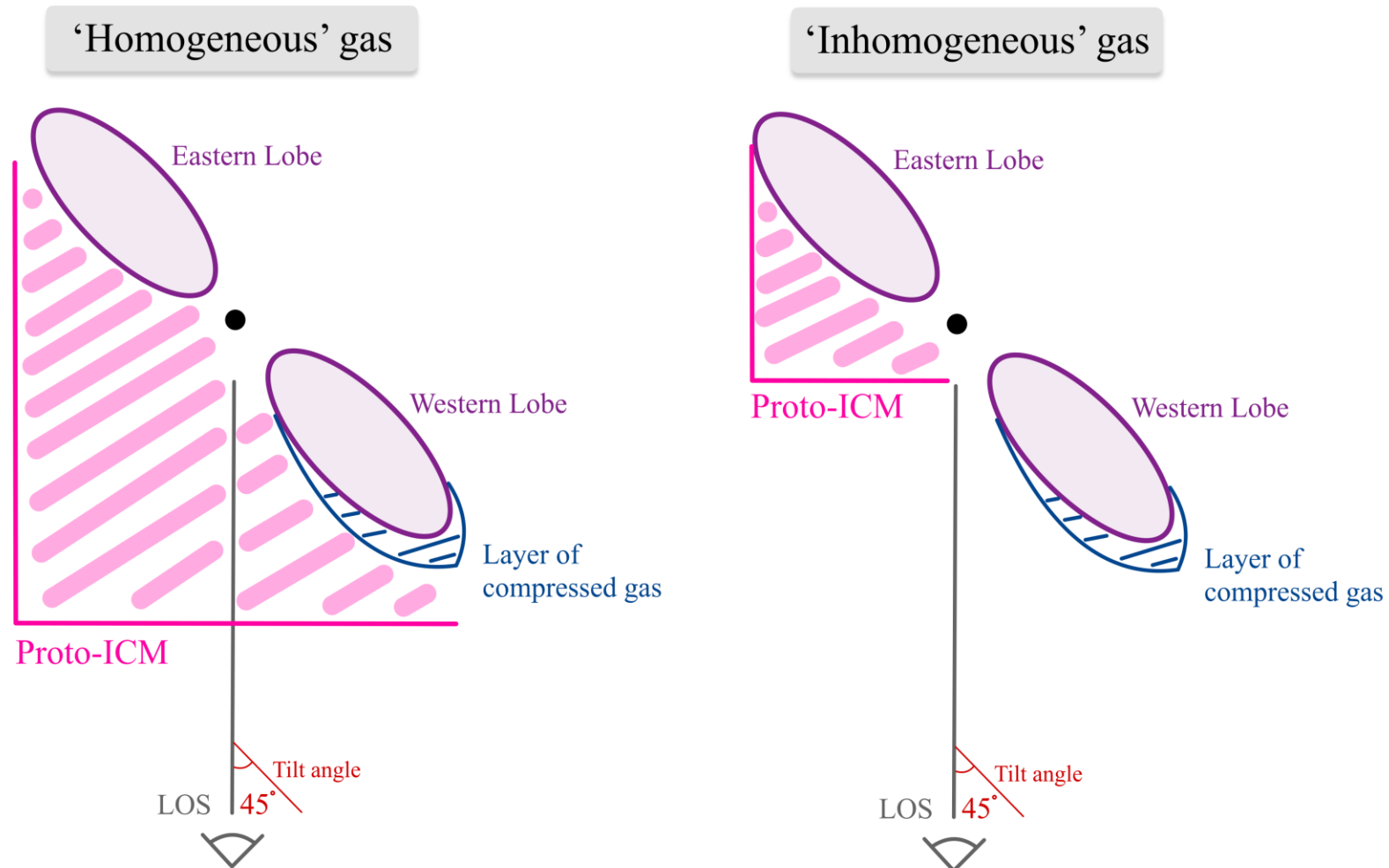
$$\sigma_{\text{RM}} \sim 36 \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$



$$\sigma_{\text{RM,W}} \sim 39 \text{ rad m}^{-2}; \sigma_{\text{RM,E}} \sim 17 \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

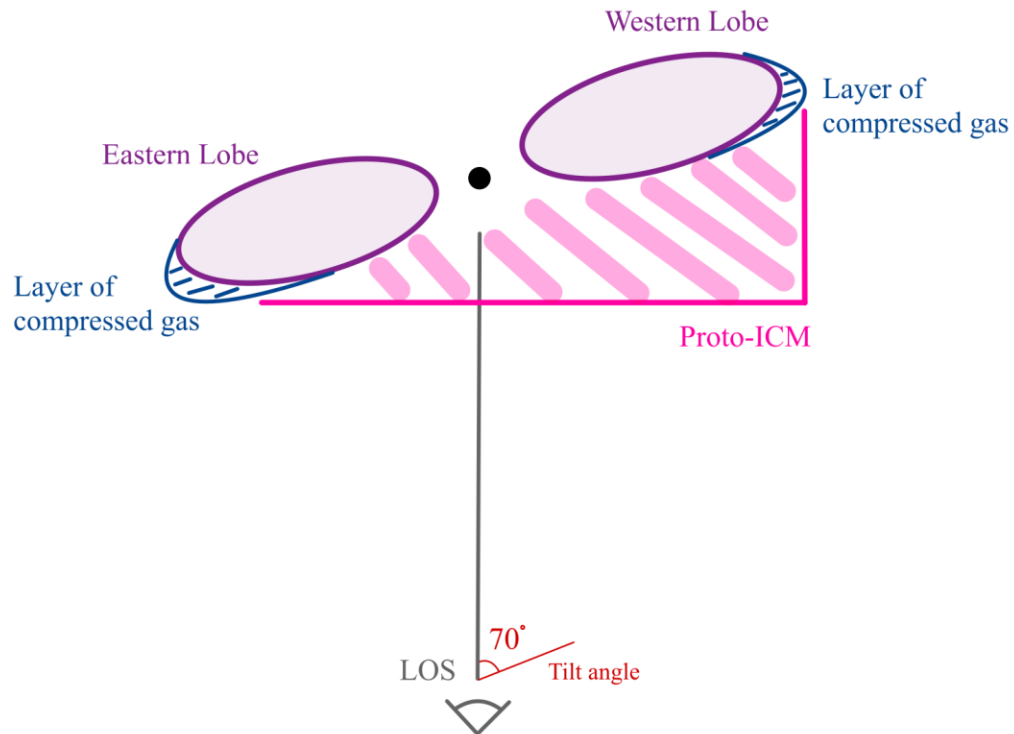
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CARLA J1510+5958

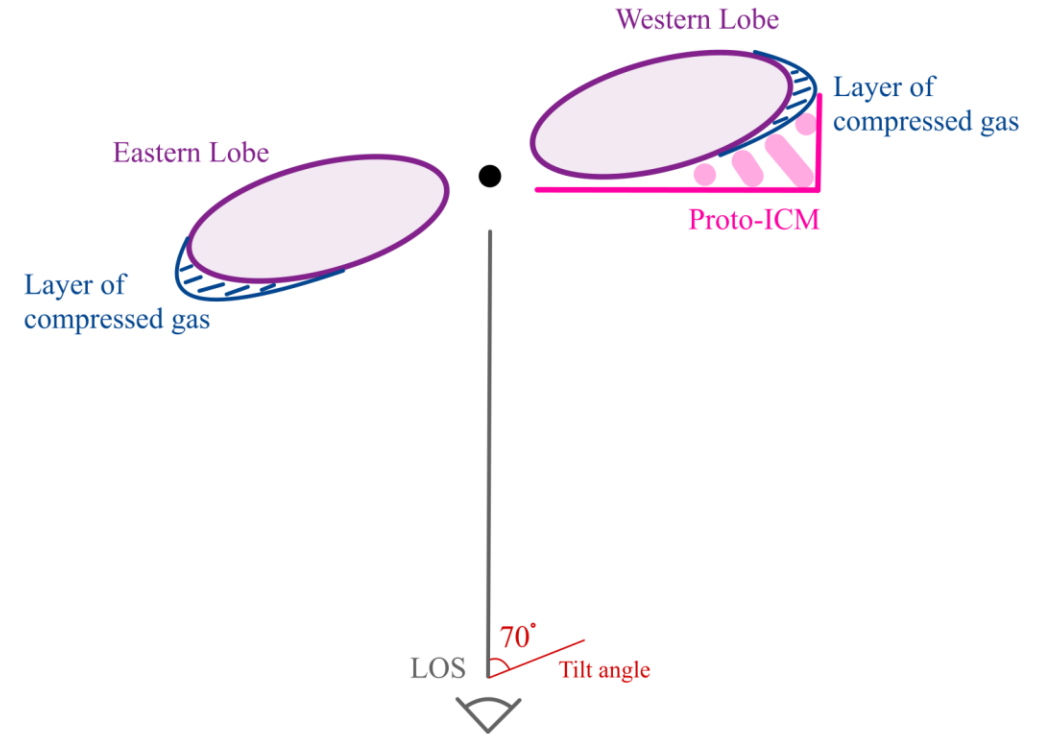


CARLA J1358+5752

‘Homogeneous’ gas



‘Inhomogeneous’ gas



Magnetic Field Estimate

CARLA J1510+5958

Lower limits

of the magnetic field intensity
from the *non-detection* of the
Eastern lobe (via comparison
with [simulations](#))

CARLA J1358+5752

Constrain

of the magnetic field intensity
from the *depolarisation* of the
Western lobe (via comparison
with [simulations](#))

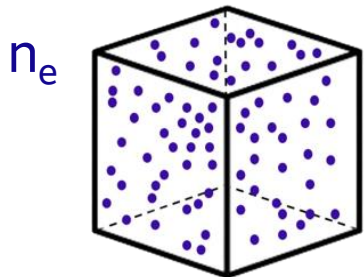
Semi-analytical simulations with **MIRO'** (Bonafede+13)

Semi-analytical simulations with **MIRO'** (Bonafede+13)

1

3D gas density model

Cube with a mean gas
density and
fluctuations of 5%

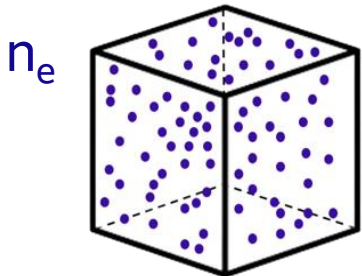


Semi-analytical simulations with **MIRO'** (Bonafede+13)

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3D gas density model

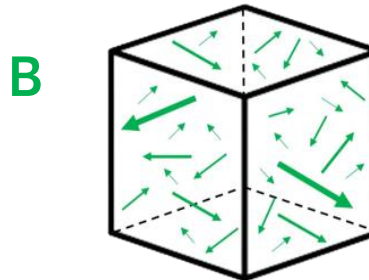
Cube with a mean gas density and fluctuations of 5%



2

*3D magnetic field model
(random distribution)*

Kolmogorov power spectrum

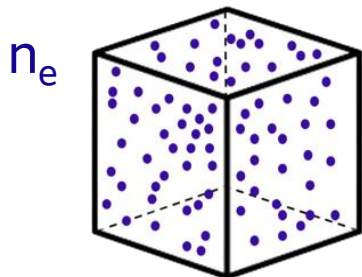


Semi-analytical simulations with **MIRO'** (Bonafeде+13)

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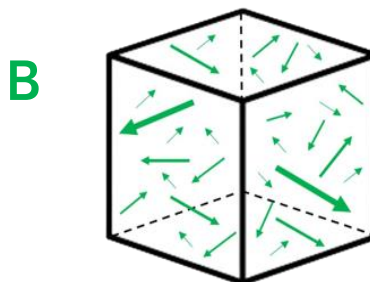
Cube with a mean gas density and fluctuations of 5%



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*3D magnetic field model
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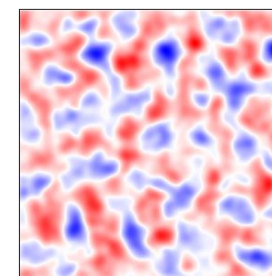
Kolmogorov power spectrum



3

2D RM map

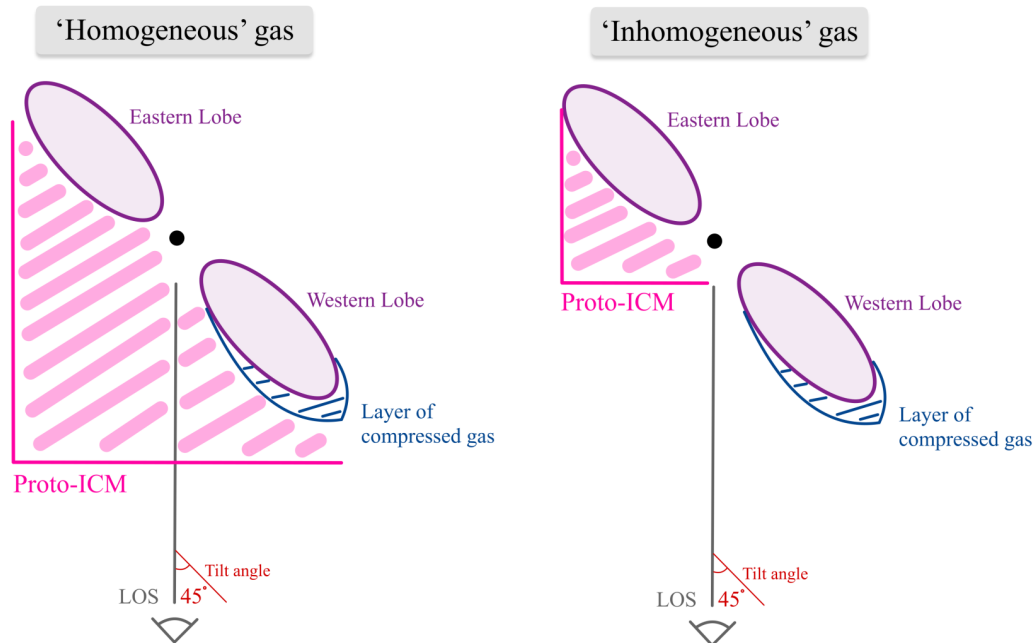
$$RM \propto \langle n_e \rangle \cdot \langle B \rangle \cdot L$$



CARLA J1510+5958

Upper limit in the polarisation fraction of the Eastern lobe:

$\sim 2\%$



Lower limit for the RM dispersion:

$$\Pi(\lambda) = \Pi_0 e^{-2\sigma_{\text{RM}}^2 \lambda^4}$$

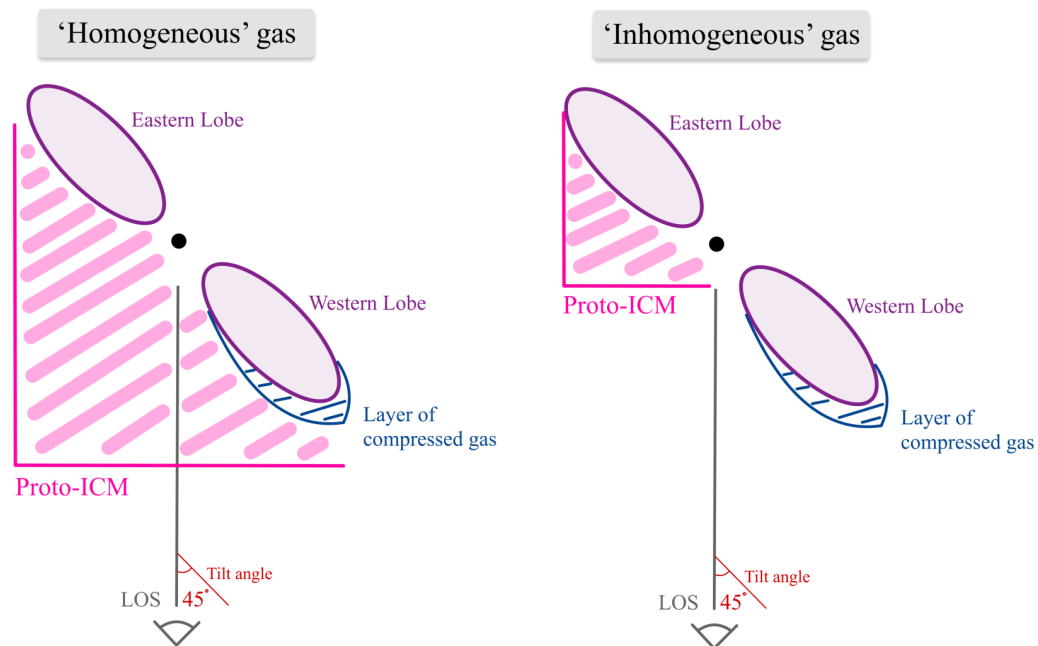
155 rad m⁻²



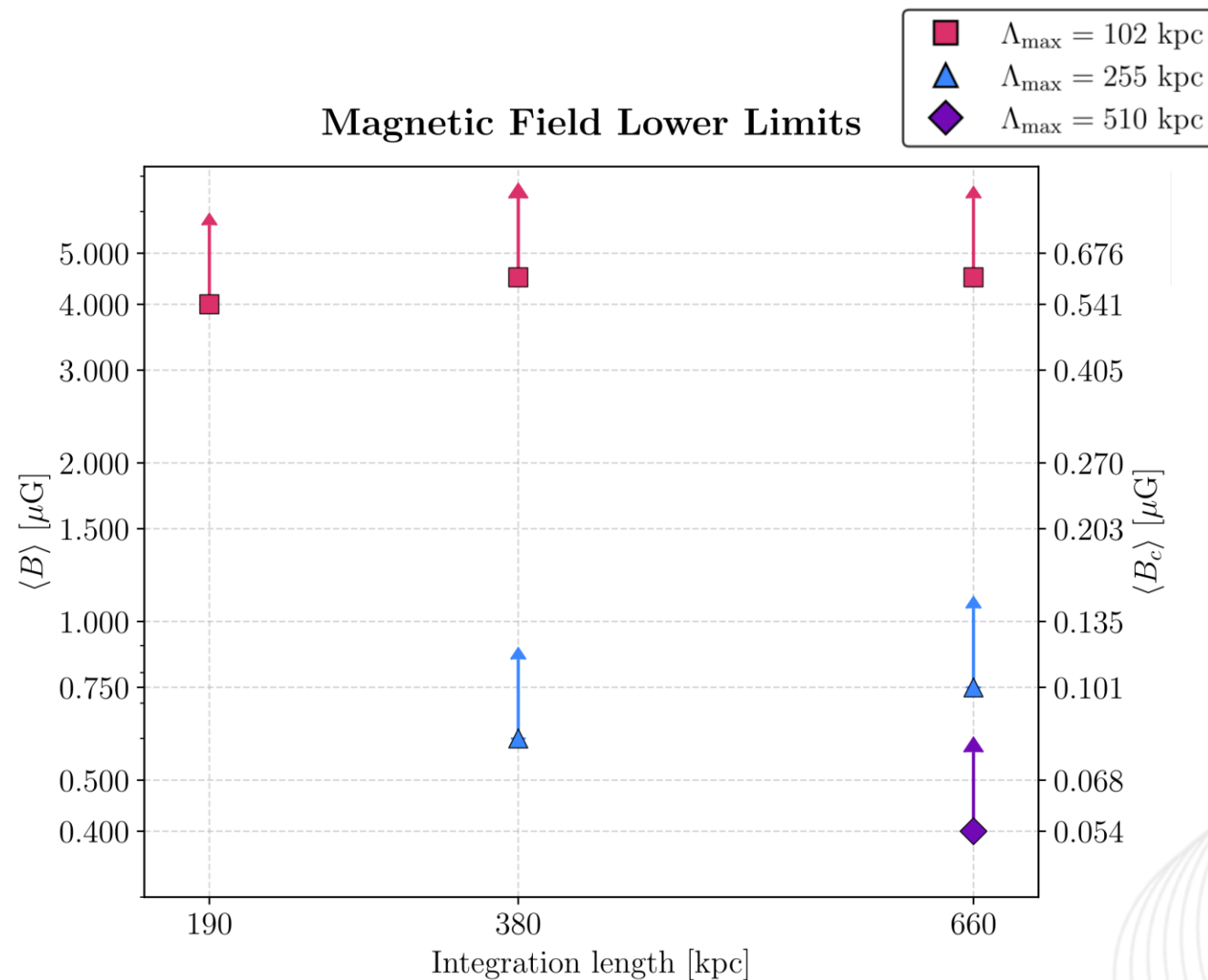
vs simulations

Lower limit of the
magnetic field intensity

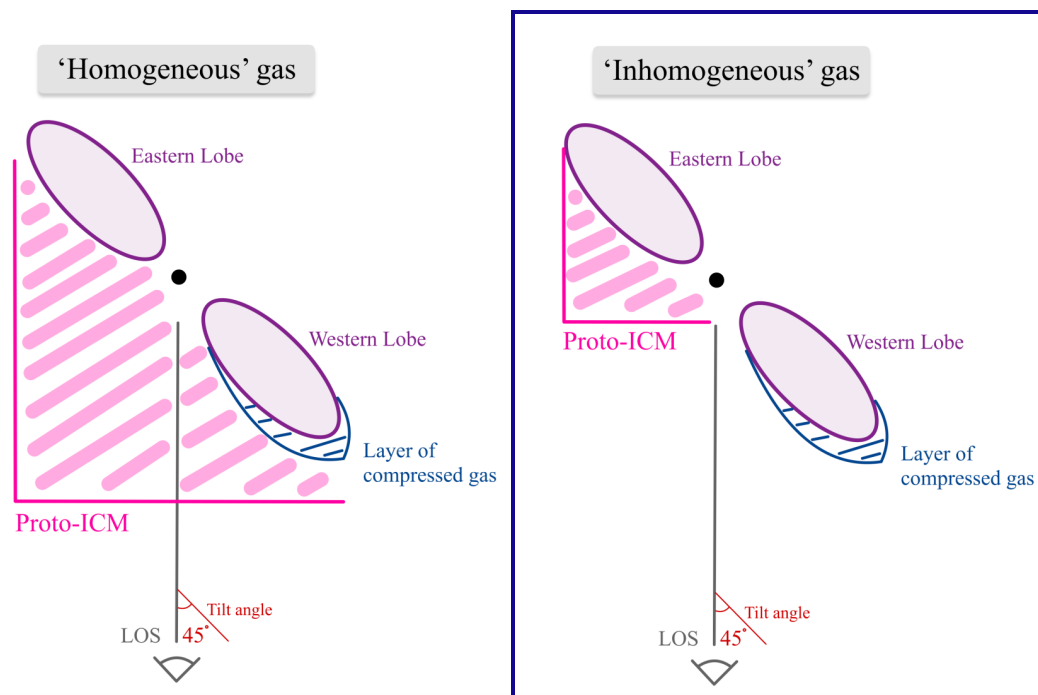
CARLA J1510+5958



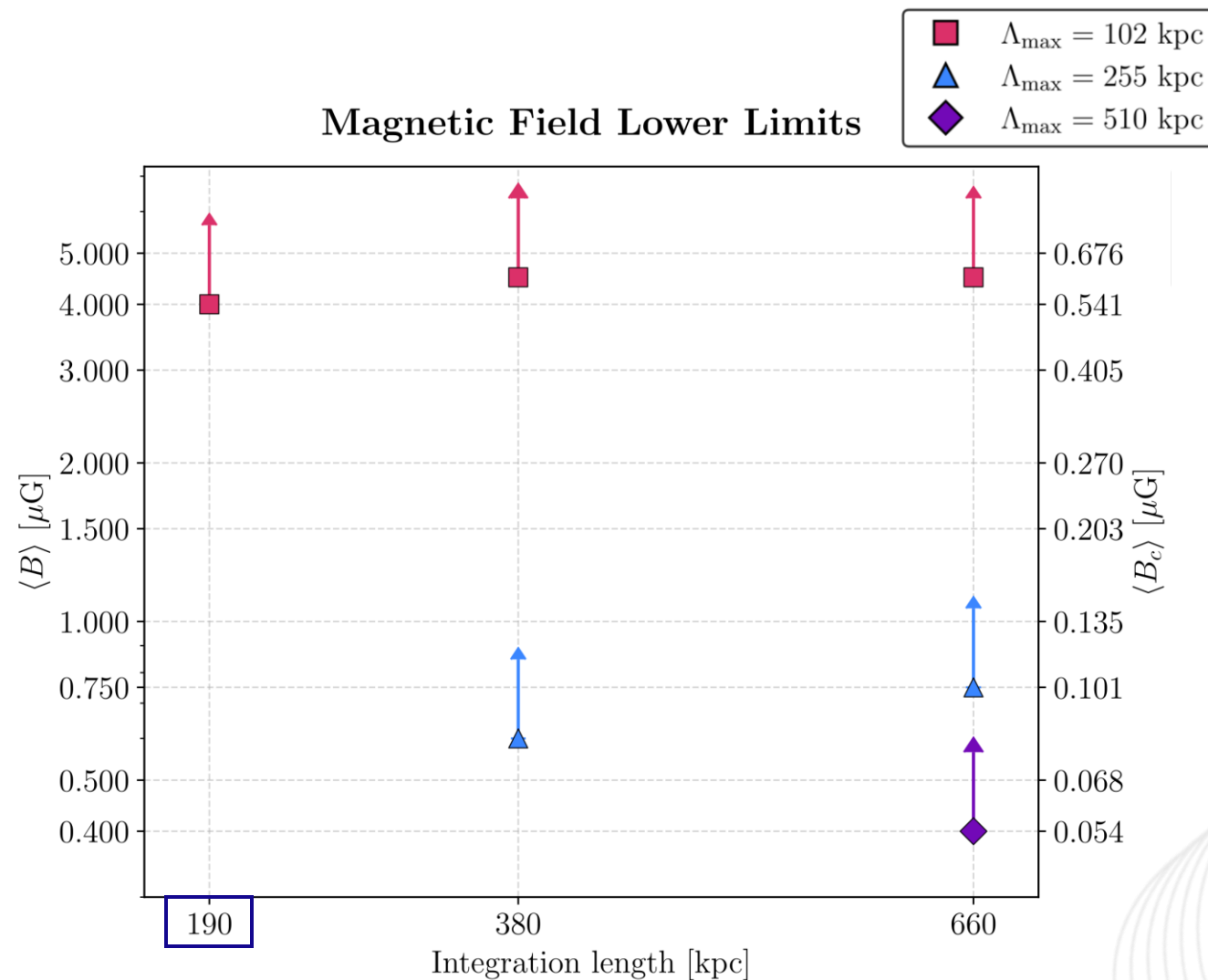
Magnetic Field Lower Limits



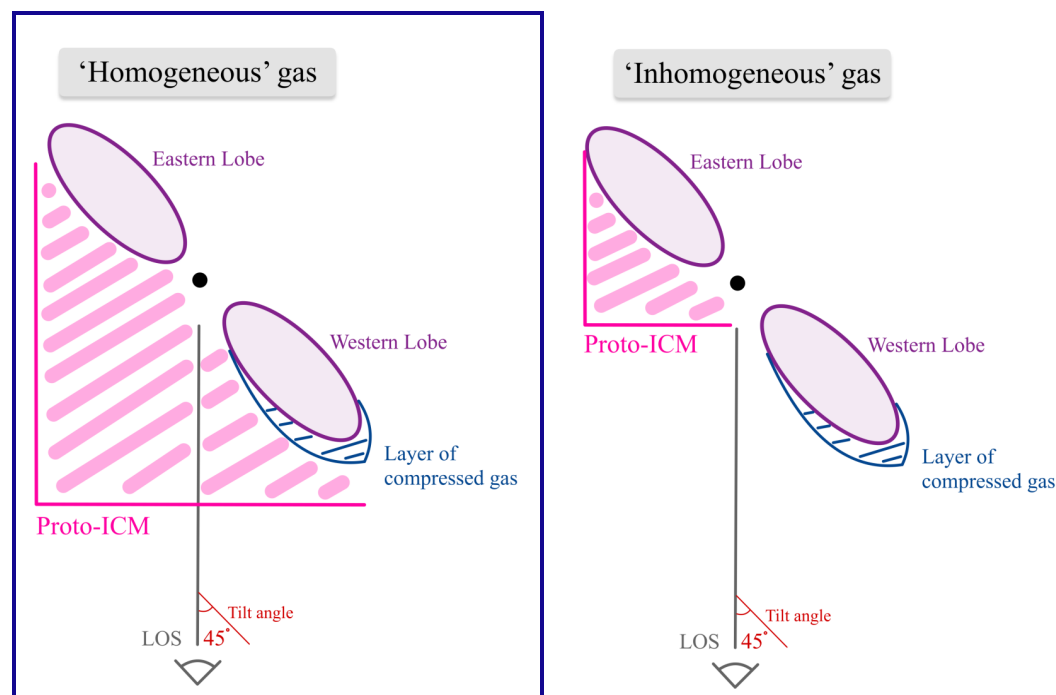
CARLA J1510+5958



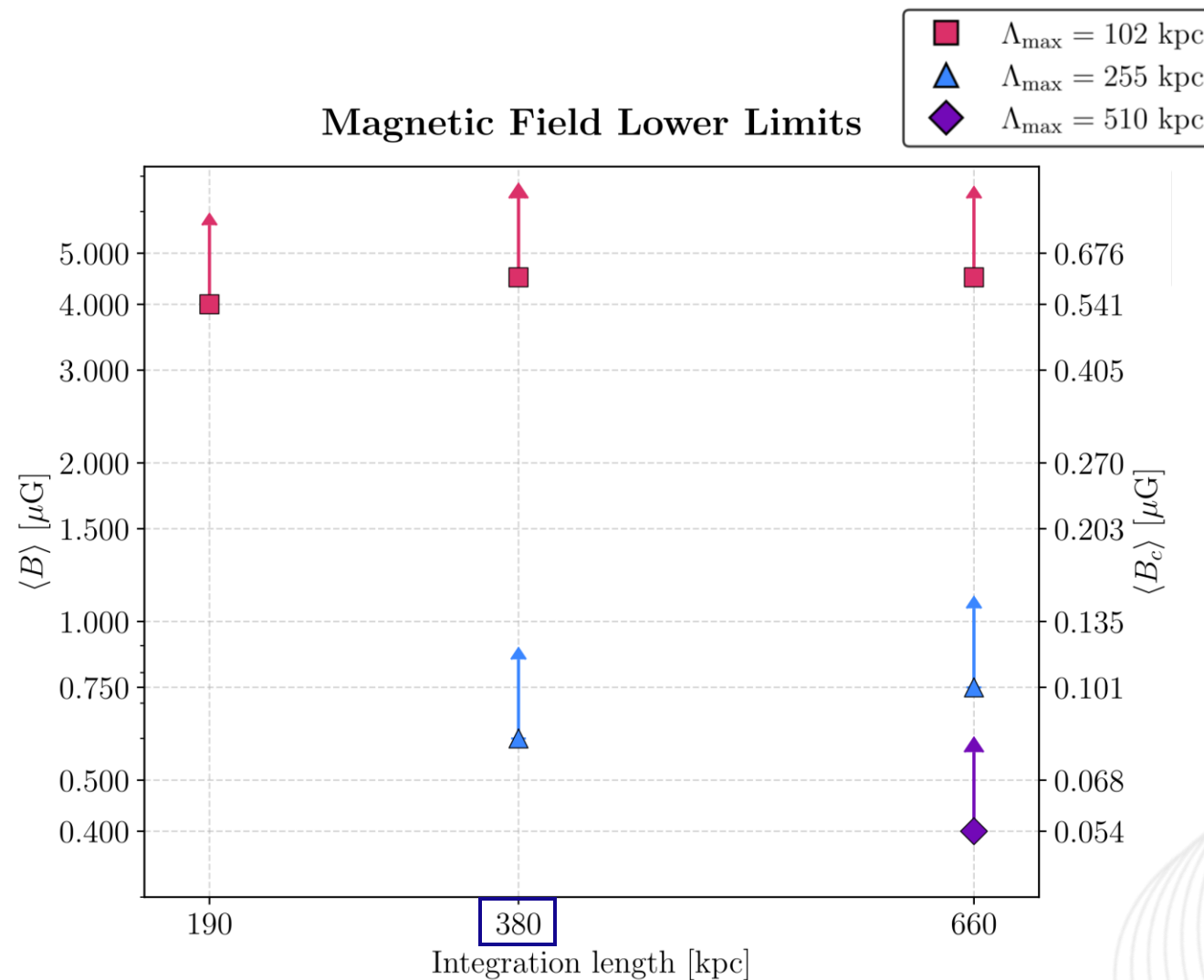
Magnetic Field Lower Limits



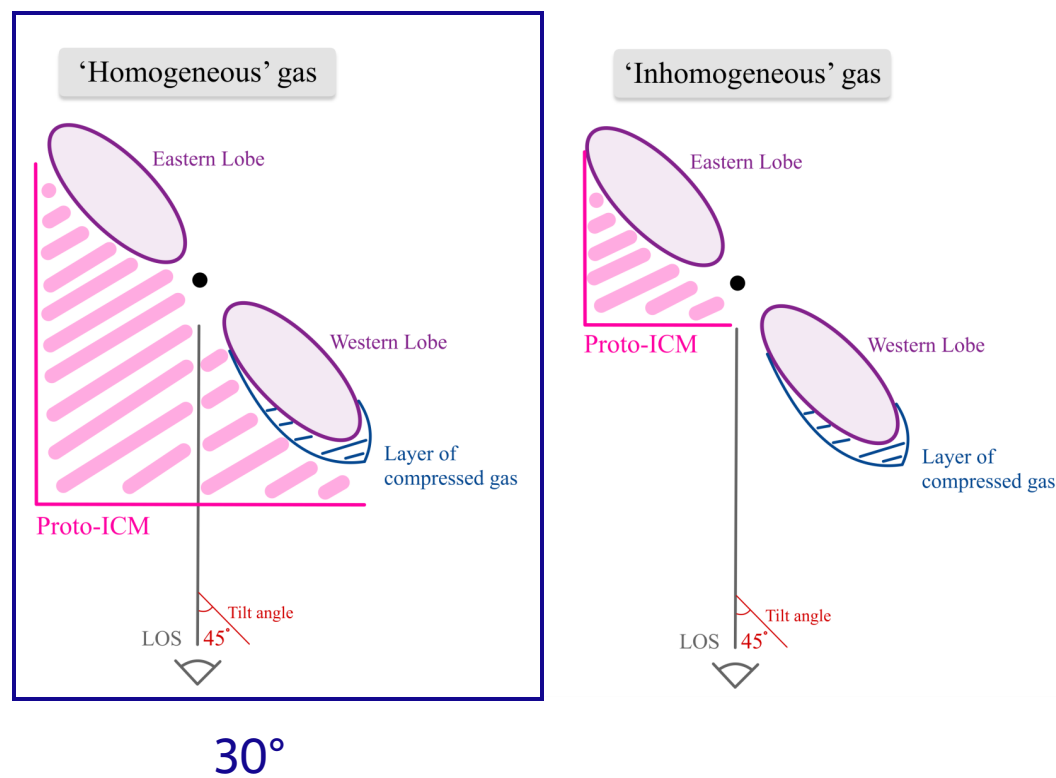
CARLA J1510+5958



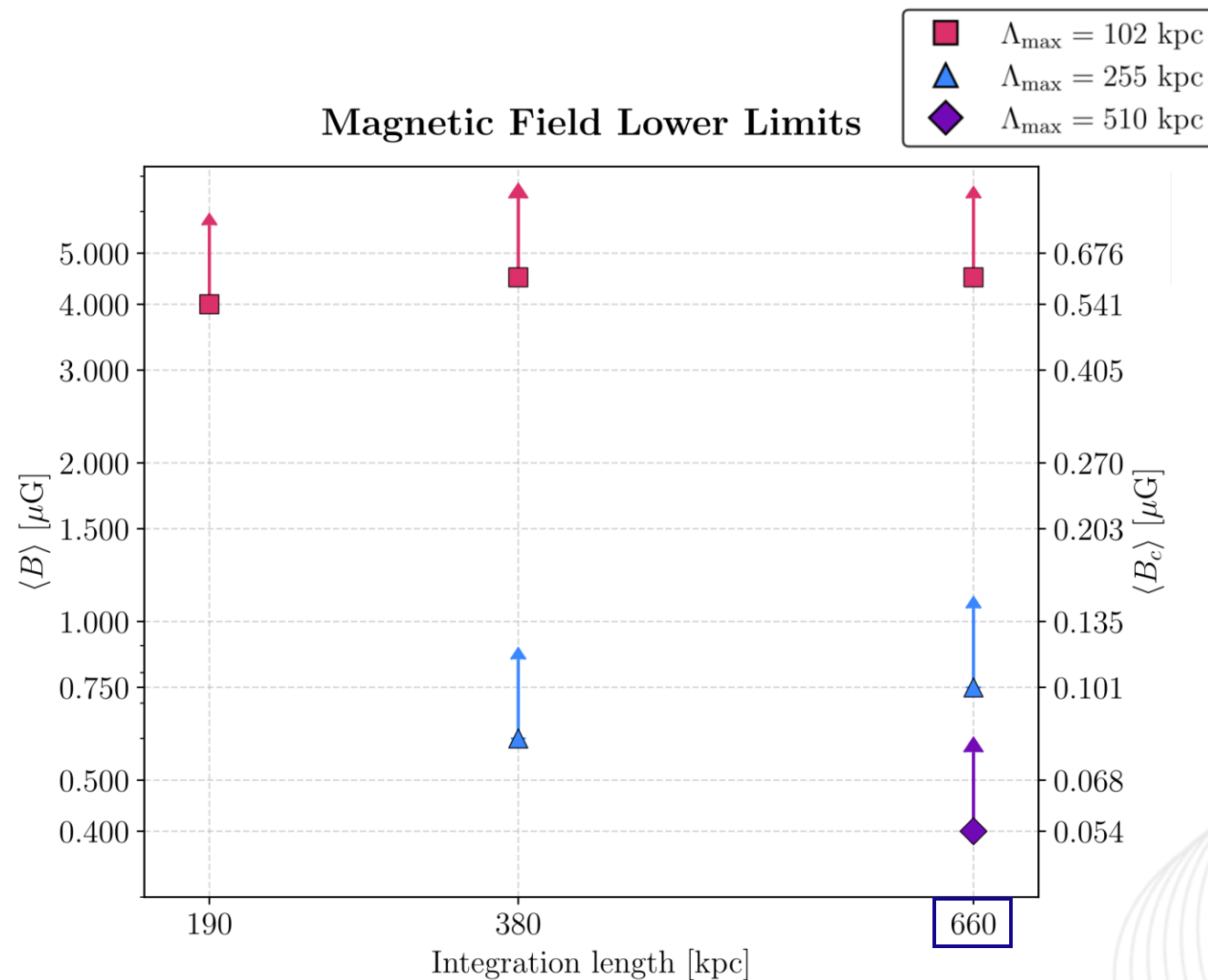
Magnetic Field Lower Limits



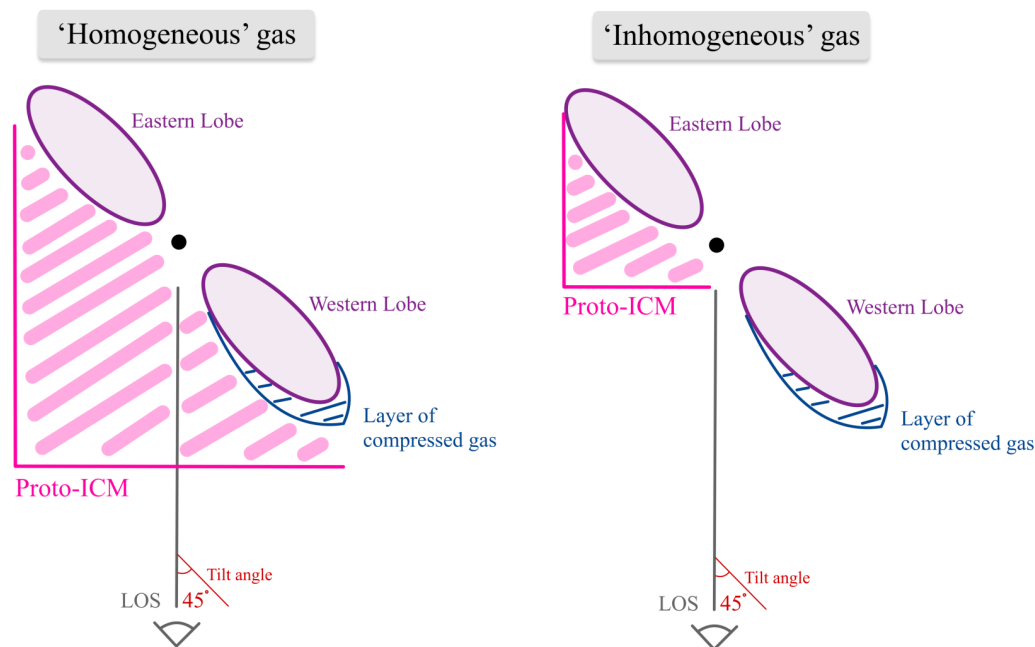
CARLA J1510+5958



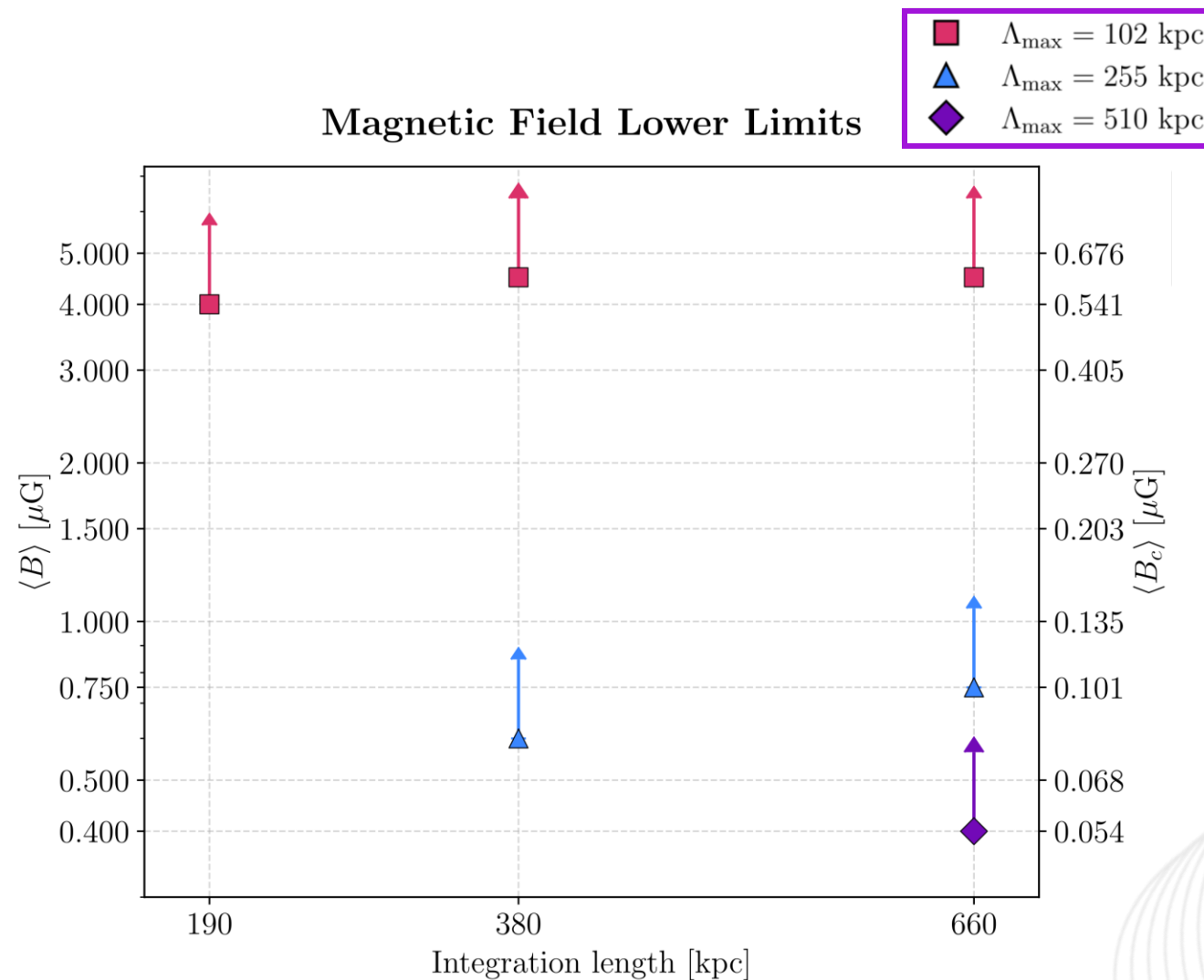
Magnetic Field Lower Limits



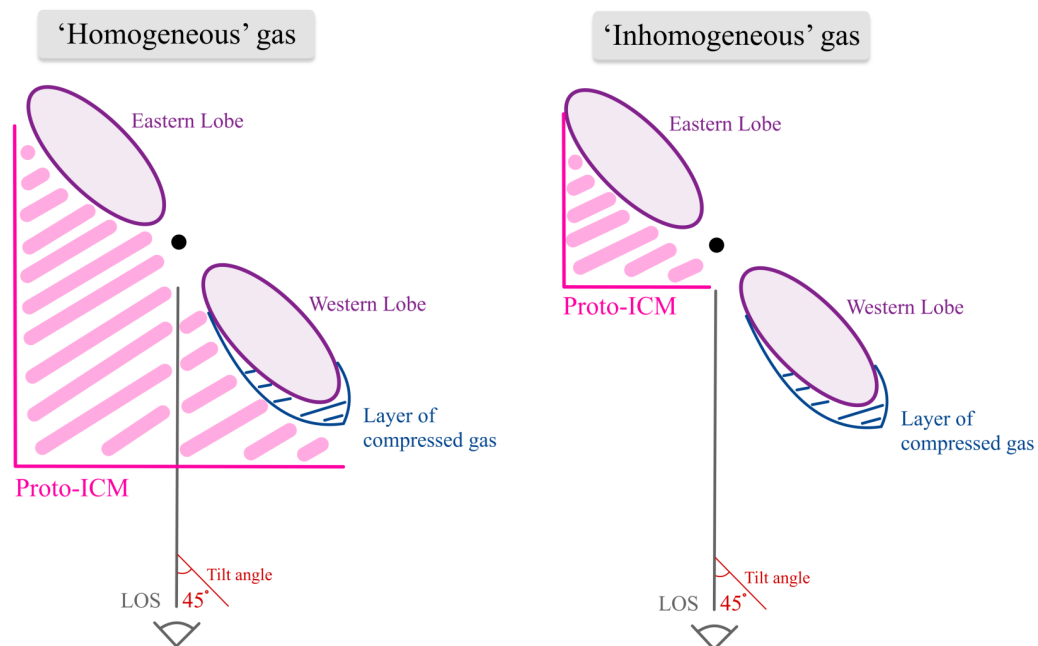
CARLA J1510+5958



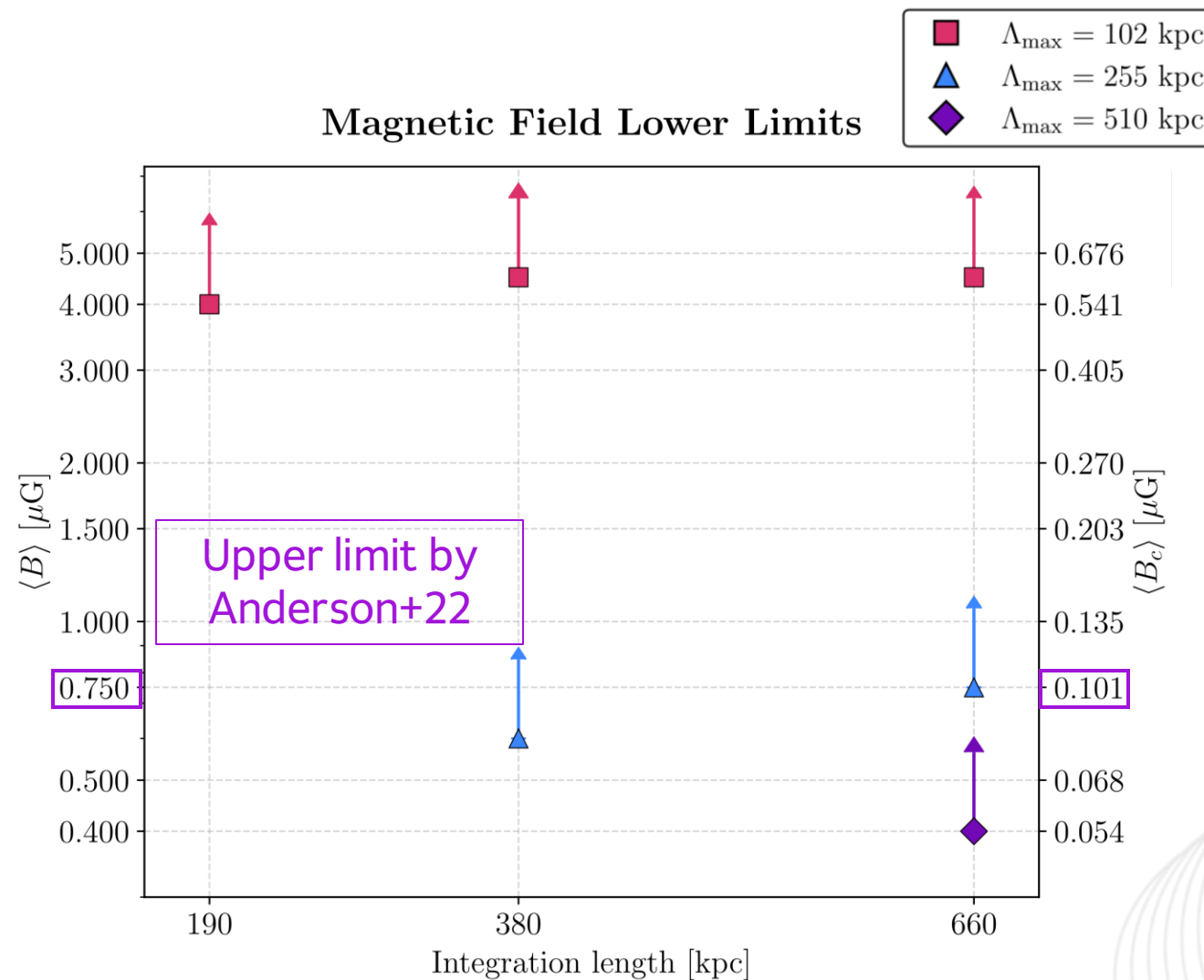
Magnetic Field Lower Limits



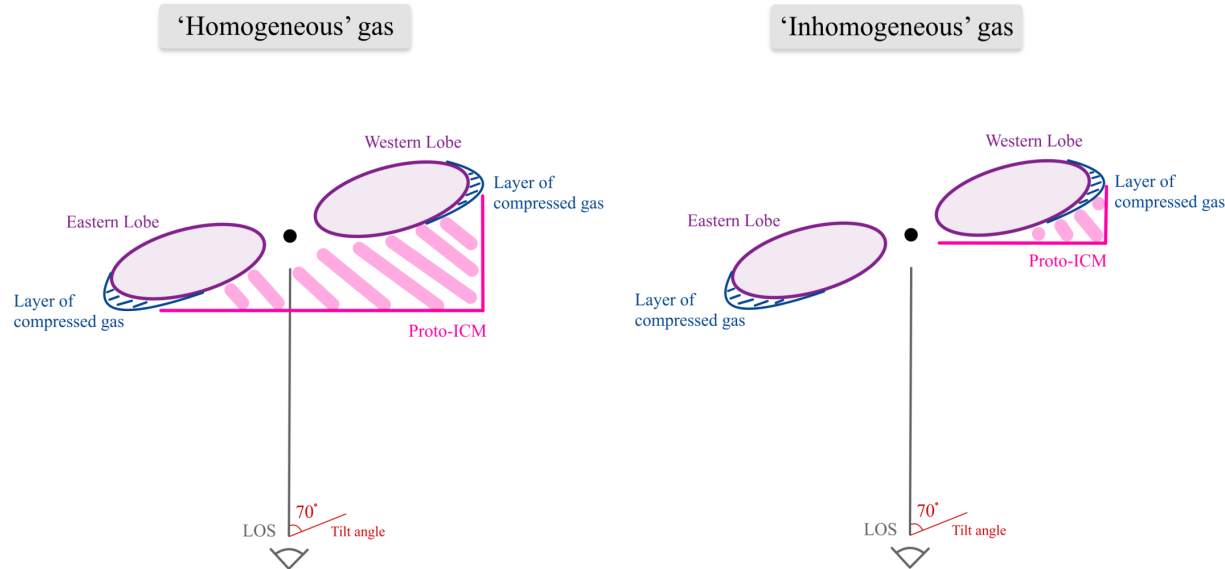
CARLA J1510+5958



Magnetic Field Lower Limits



CARLA J1358+5752



Average polarisation fraction of the lobes:

$(2.8 \pm 2.0)\%$ (E. Lobe); $(0.9 \pm 0.6)\%$ (W. Lobe)

Value for the RM dispersion:

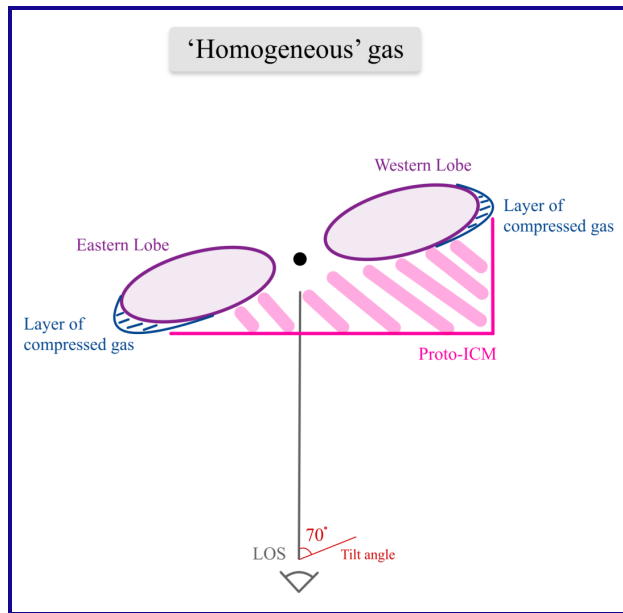
$$\Pi(\lambda) = \Pi_0 e^{-2\sigma_{\text{RM}}^2 \lambda^4}$$

$(106 \pm 44) \text{ rad m}^{-2}$

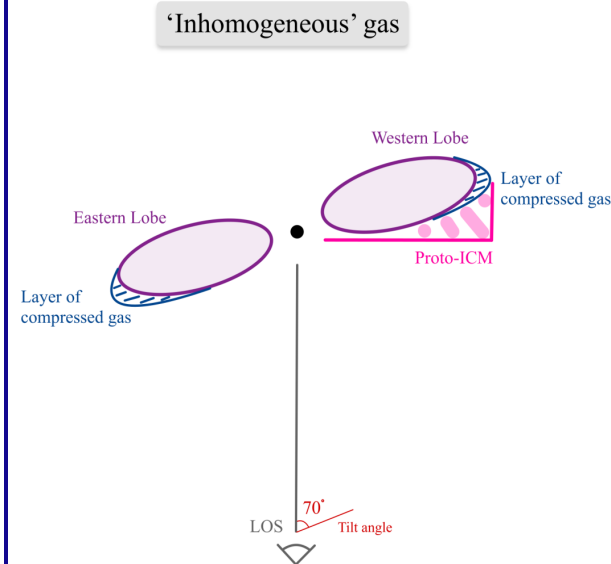
↓ vs simulations

Constrain of the
magnetic field intensity

CARLA J1358+5752



60°



- Integration = 284 kpc
- $n_e = 2.709 \times 10^{-3} \text{ cm}^{-3}$
- $\Lambda = [10.15, 252.5] \text{ kpc}$

1

$$\sigma_{\text{RM}} = (77.8 \pm 14.9) \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

$$\langle B \rangle = 1.5 \mu\text{G}$$

$$\text{ChiSq} = 0.37$$

2

$$\sigma_{\text{RM}} = (142.8 \pm 40.4) \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

$$\langle B \rangle = 1.75 \mu\text{G}$$

$$\text{ChiSq} = 0.38$$

1 *Large bandwidth* to cover both the **lower** and **higher** frequencies

High resolution in *Faraday space*
Low values of the RM

High *spatial* resolution
High values of the RM

Telescope	Band	Frequency Range (MHz)	Available Bandwidth (MHz)	Notes (MHz)
SKA1-Low	N/A	50 - 350	300	(1)
SKA1-Mid	1	350 - 1050	700	(1)
	2	950 - 1760	810	(1)
	3	1650 - 3050	1400	(2)
	4	2800 - 5180	2380	(2)
	5a	4600 - 8500	3900	(1)
	5b	8300 - 15400	2 x 2500	(1)

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	5b	8300 - 15400	2 x 2500	(1)

With the AA* (15-m only dishes) the bandwidth is **fully covered**

Band 1 (350 – 1050 MHz)

- Resolution in Faraday space: **5 rad m⁻²**



Discriminate between the
contribution of *multiple components*
along the LOS

Band 1 (350 – 1050 MHz)

- Resolution in Faraday space: **5 rad m⁻²**



Discriminate between the contribution of *multiple components* along the LOS

Band 2 (950 – 1760 MHz)

- Spatial resolution: **4" x 4"**



Minimise the *beam depolarisation*
Resolve the source
Derive a *dispersion of the RM*

+ **Band 3 (1650 – 3050 MHz)** for higher spatial resolution

Minimum Frequency [GHz]	Channel [MHz]	$\Phi_{\max}$ [rad m ⁻²]	$\Phi_{\max, \text{source frame}}$ [rad m ⁻²]
0.350	1	414	3,063
	4	105	777
	8	53	392
0.950	1	8,263	61,133
	4	2,076	15,359
	8	1,044	7,724
1.650	1	43,265	320,092
	4	10,845	80,236
	8	5,442	40,262

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0.350	1	414	
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		2,076	15,359
	8	1,044	7,724
	1	43,265	320,092
	4	10,845	80,236
	8	5,442	40,262

Complete view of what it is happening in the proto-cluster

2

High *flux sensitivity*

Continuum flux sensitivity (1 h) : 5.50 $\mu\text{Jy beam}^{-1}$ (Band 1)
2.50 $\mu\text{Jy beam}^{-1}$ (Band 2)

~ flux sensitivity in polarisation

2

High *flux sensitivity*

Continuum flux sensitivity (1 h) : 5.50 $\mu\text{Jy beam}^{-1}$ (Band 1)
2.50 $\mu\text{Jy beam}^{-1}$ (Band 2)

~ flux sensitivity in polarisation

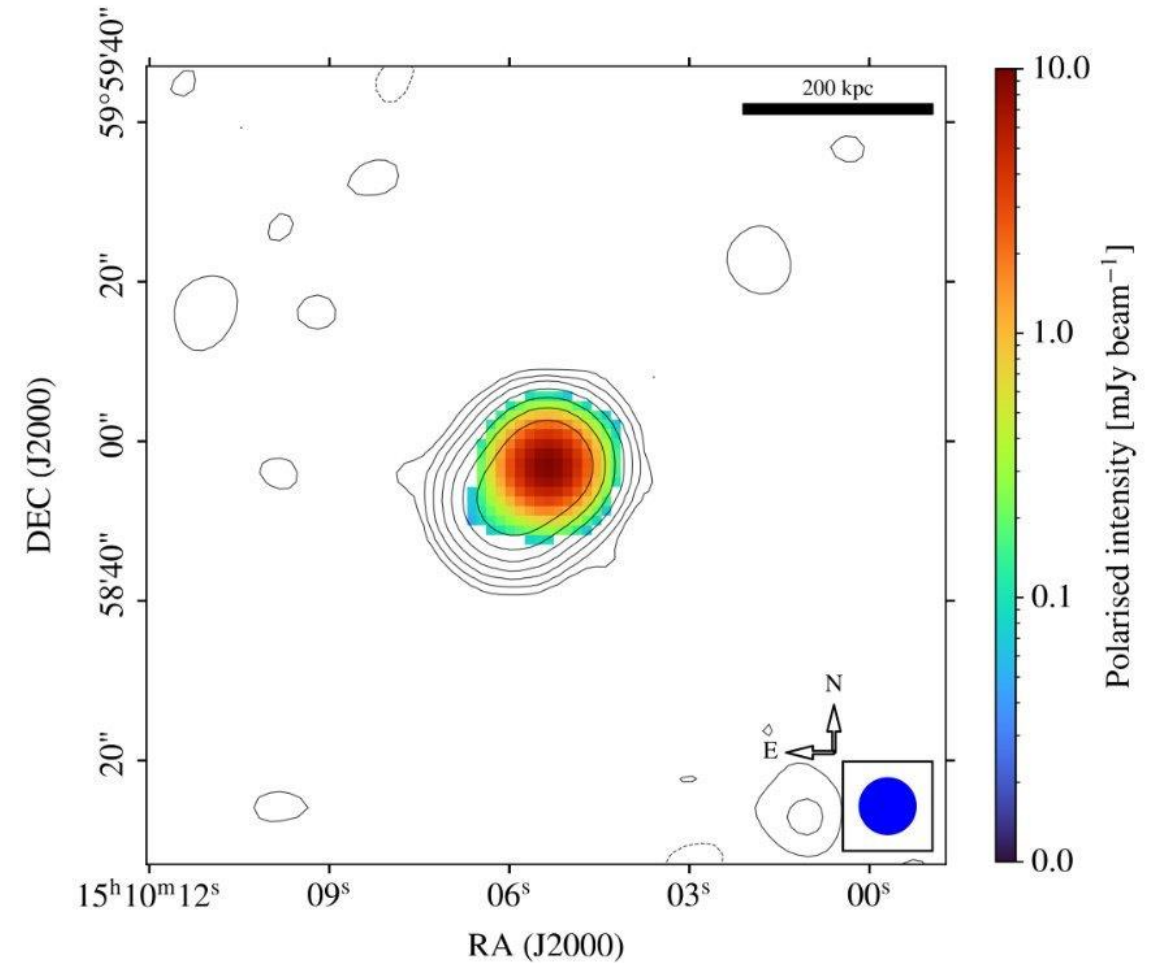
... to recover the very *faint polarised radiation* coming from:

- the central source

CARLA J1510+5958: Eastern Lobe

Total surface brightness peak:

$22.80 \text{ mJy beam}^{-1}$



CARLA J1510+5958: Eastern Lobe

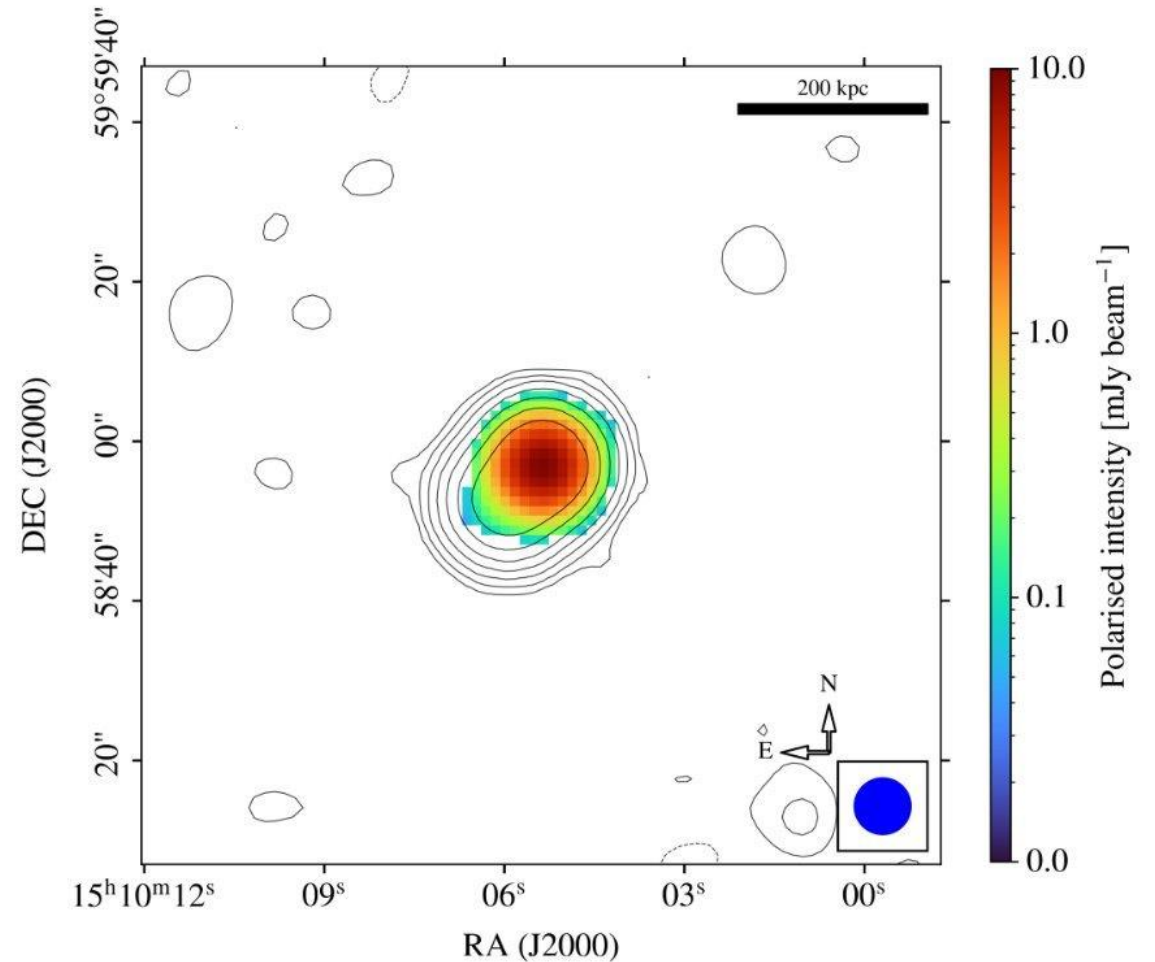
Total surface brightness peak:

$$22.80 \text{ mJy beam}^{-1}$$

Pol. surface brightness peak:

$$0.02 \times S_{l,\text{peak}} \\ = 0.46 \text{ mJy beam}^{-1} > 3\sigma_l$$

Detected with SKAO Band 2



2

High *flux sensitivity*

Continuum flux sensitivity (1 h) : 5.50 $\mu\text{Jy beam}^{-1}$ (Band 1)
2.50 $\mu\text{Jy beam}^{-1}$ (Band 2)

~ flux sensitivity in polarisation

... to recover the very *faint polarised radiation* coming from:

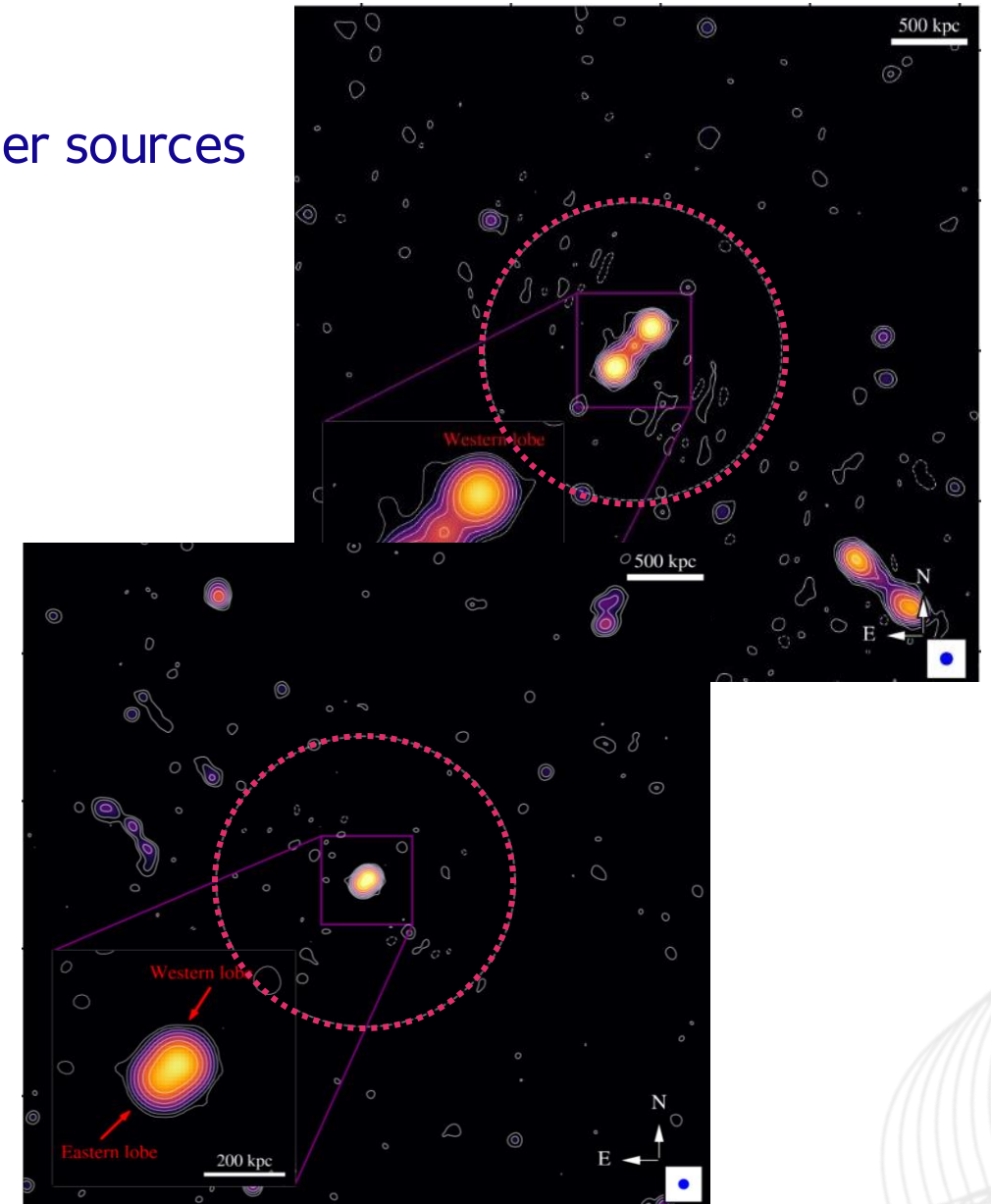
- the central source
- proto-cluster member or background sources...

CARLA J1510+5958 & J1358+5752: Background and member sources

Few sources could be detected if polarised to 5-10% with 1 hr observation

With 2 hr observation the flux sensitivity improves by a factor of $(2)^{1/2}$

Detection of a larger number of polarised sources



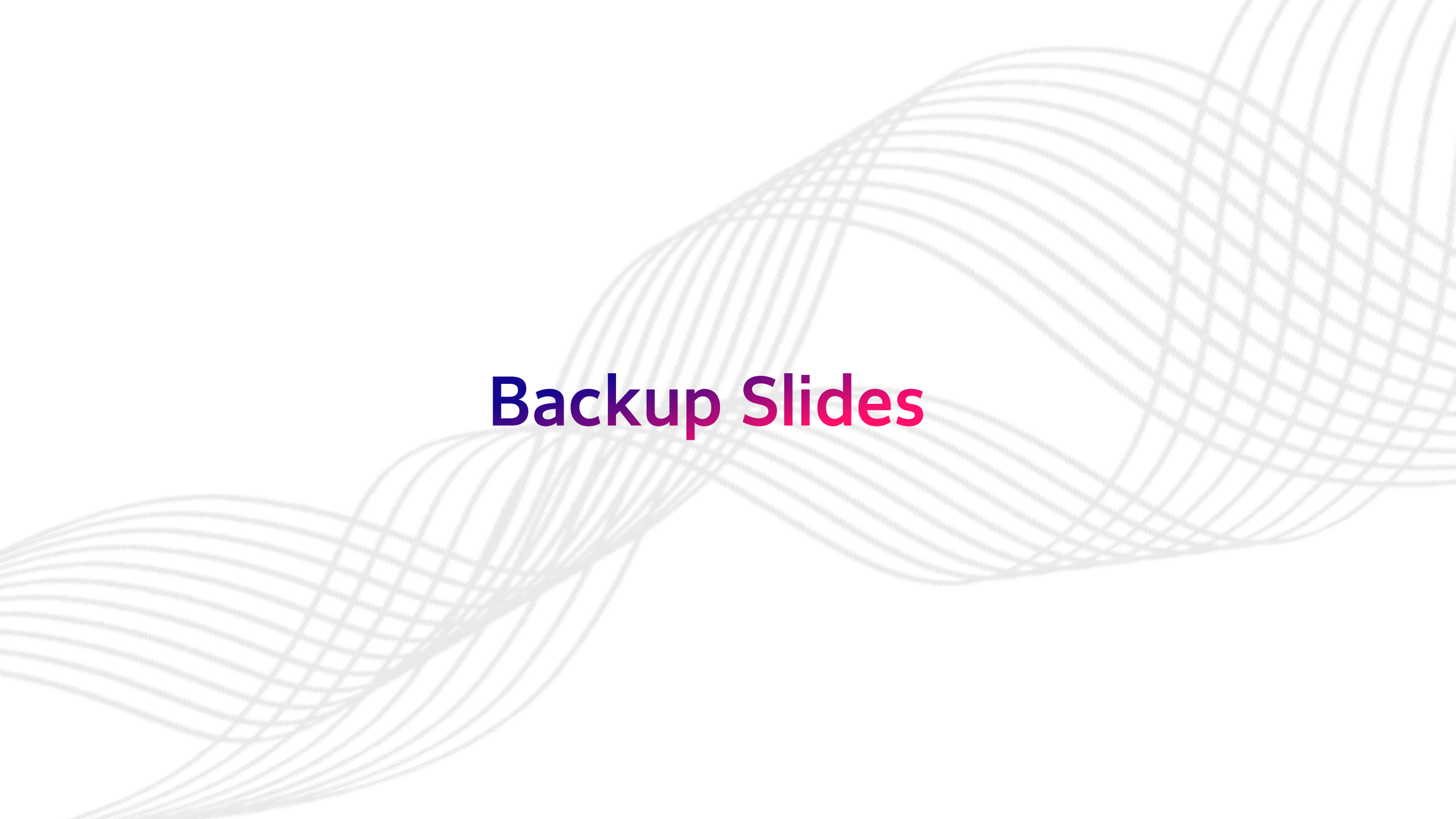
- probe **early phases of galaxy clusters** to shed light on **origin** and **evolution** of magnetic fields
- exploit **VLA** data (1-2 GHz) of 2 proto-clusters: **CARLA J1510+5958 & J1358+5752**
 - from **observations**:
 - 1) uniform distribution of the **RM** or gradients related to local variations
 - 2) depolarisation of **one lobe** (total or partial)
 - from **simulations**:
 - 1) CARLA J1510+5958: **$B > 0.5 \mu\text{G}$** from non-detection
 - 2) CARLA J1358+5752: **$B \sim 1.6 \mu\text{G}$**

AGN immersed into an early-magnetised proto-ICM

- **Future**: SKAO Band 1 and Band 2 (+ Band 3) combination will provide high spatial resolution, Faraday resolution, flux sensitivity and large Faraday coverage

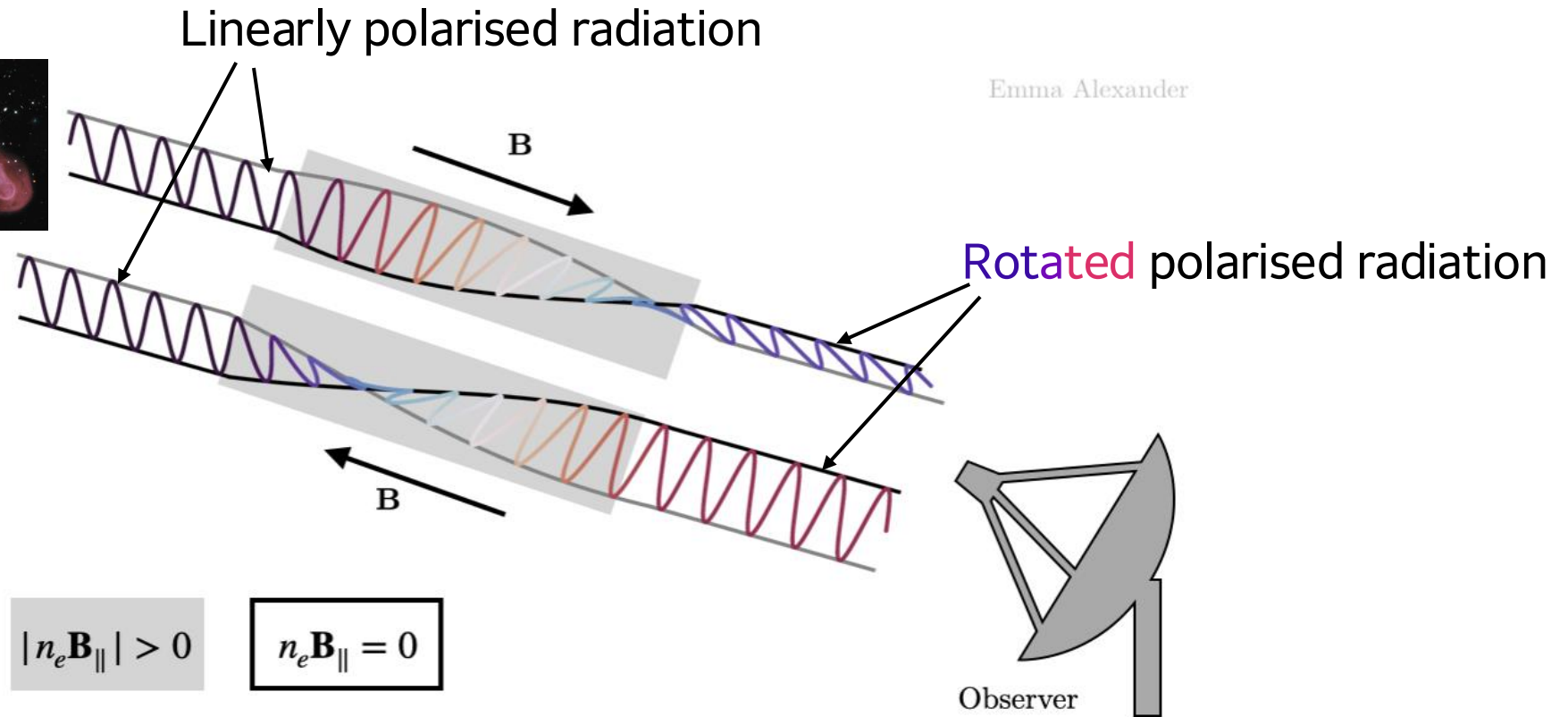
**Recover the polarised emission
from fainter sources**



The background features a series of overlapping, wavy lines in a light gray color. These lines create a sense of movement and depth. Overlaid on these waves is a grid of thin, light gray lines that form a mesh-like pattern. The overall effect is a modern, abstract design.

Backup Slides

Radio loud AGN



Emma Alexander

Magneto-ionic medium
(e.g. ICM, proto-ICM, ...)

Credits: Emma Alexander

from X-ray observations

Electron gas number density

Extension along the LOS

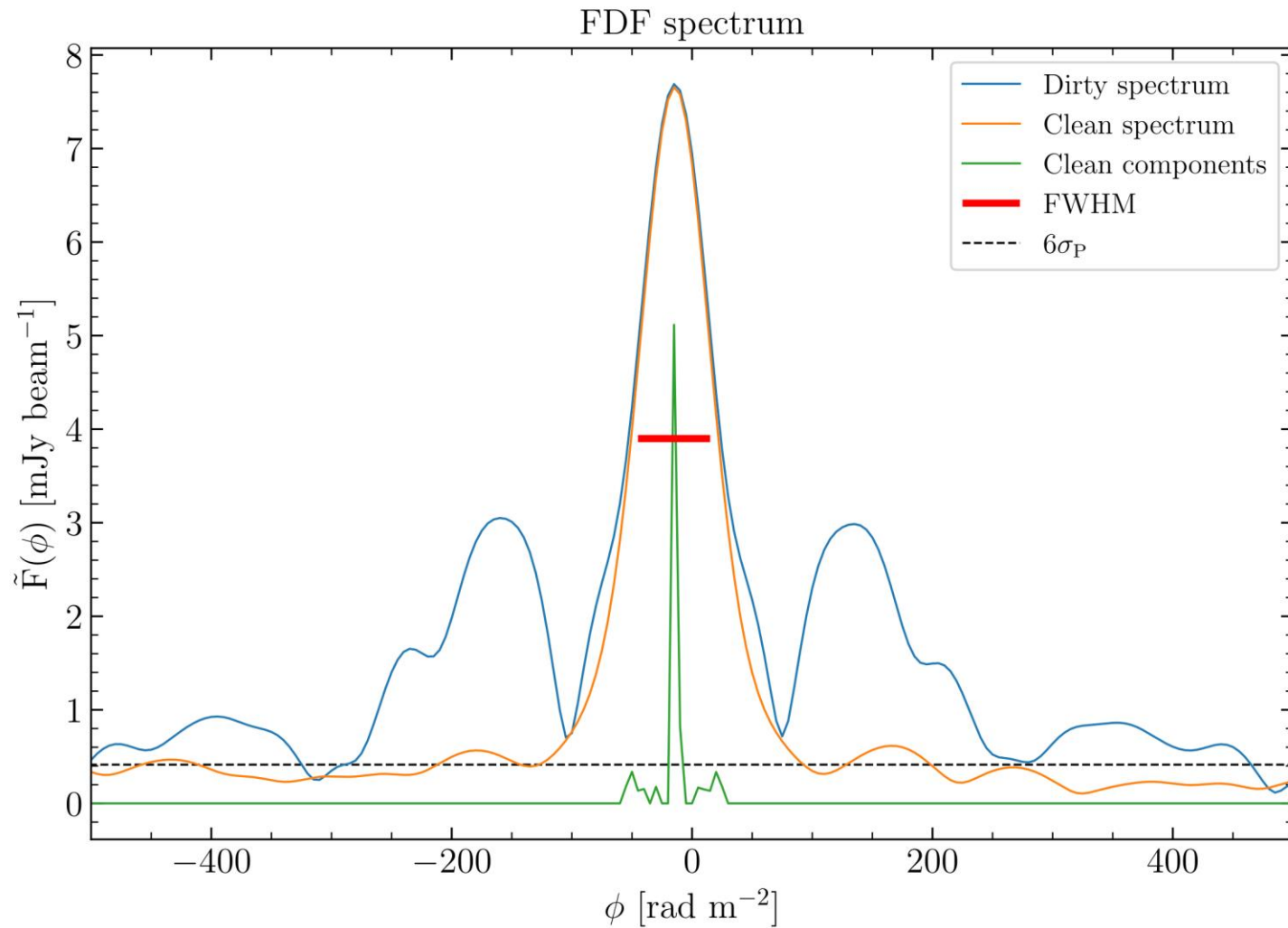
$$\text{RM} = 812 \int_{z_s}^0 \frac{n_e(z) [\text{cm}^{-3}] B_{\parallel}(z) [\mu\text{G}] dl_{[\text{kpc}]} }{(1+z)^2 dz} dz \text{ rad m}^{-2}$$

Rotation Measure

from radio observations

Magnetic field component
along the LOS

LOS = line-of-sight



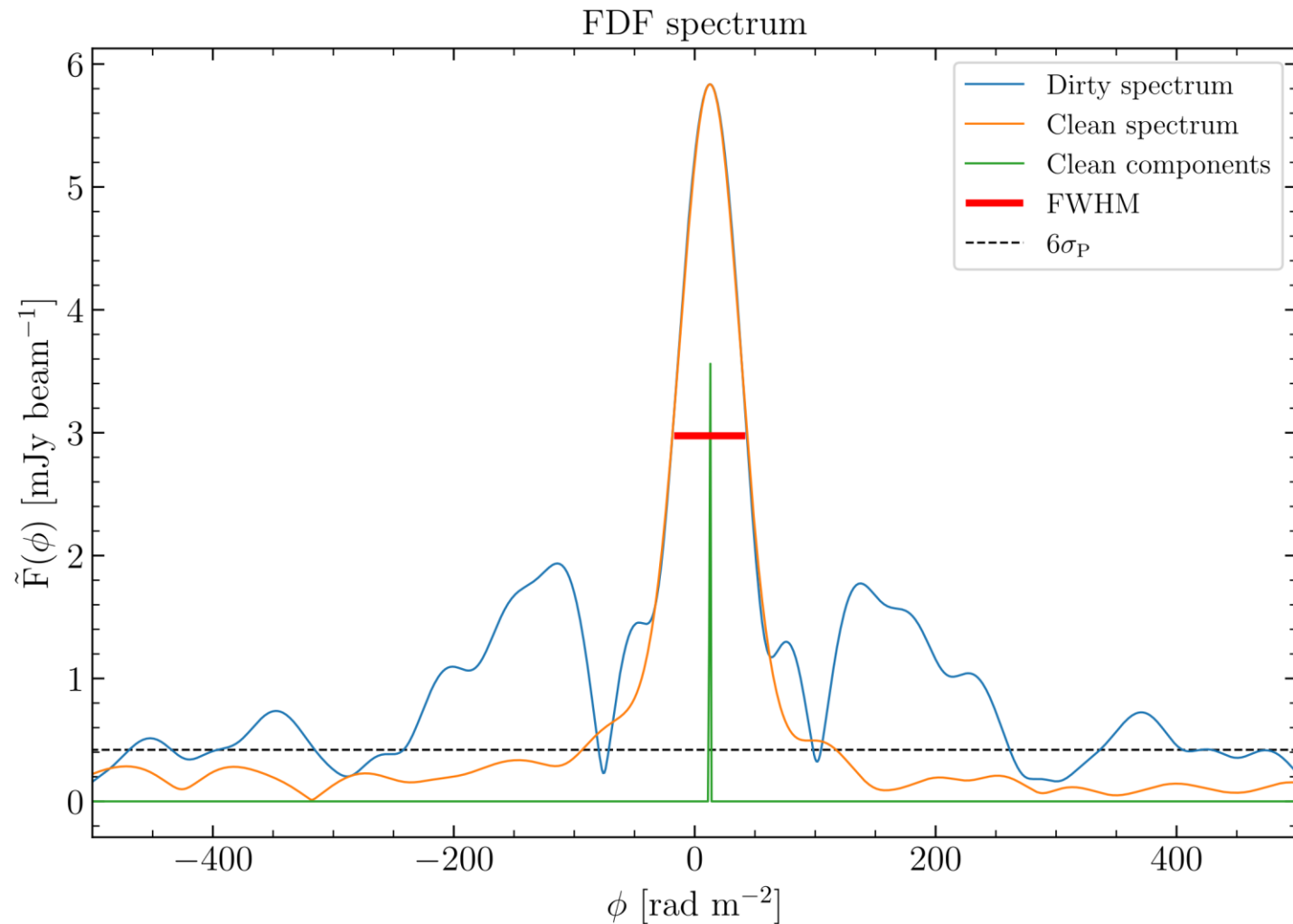
CARLA J1510+5958

FWHM = 60.23 rad m⁻²
peak at -14 rad m⁻²(*)

Maximum Faraday depth

1322 rad m⁻²
~ 9780 rad m⁻²
(source rest-frame)

(*) values not in the source rest-frame



CARLA J1358+5752

FWHM = 58.98 rad m⁻²
peak at +13 rad m⁻²(*)

Maximum Faraday depth

1291 rad m⁻²
~ 7251 rad m⁻²
(source rest-frame)

(*) values not in the source rest-frame

CARLA J1510+5958

<i>Lobe</i>	$\langle RM \rangle_s$	n_e	L	$B_{//} (physical)$	$B_{//} (comoving)$
W	-115 rad m ⁻²	10 ⁻³ – 10 ⁻¹ [cm ⁻³]	100 kpc	1.416 – 0.014 μG	0.191 – 0.002 μG

CARLA J1358+5752

<i>Lobe</i>	$\langle RM \rangle_s$	n_e	L	$B_{//} (physical)$	$B_{//} (comoving)$
W	66 rad m ⁻²	10 ⁻³ – 10 ⁻¹ [cm ⁻³]	200 kpc	0.406 – 0.004 μG	0.072-0.001 μG
E	60 rad m ⁻²	10 ⁻³ – 10 ⁻¹ [cm ⁻³]	100 kpc	0.739 – 0.007 μG	0.132-0.001 μG

<i>Lobe</i>	σ_s	n_e	L	c	$B_{//} (physical)$	$B_{//} (comoving)$
W	39 rad m ⁻²	"	200 kpc	10 kpc	1.074 – 0.011 μG	0.191-0.002 μG
E	18 rad m ⁻²	"	100 kpc	10 kpc	0.701 – 0.007 μG	0.125-0.001 μG

CARLA J1510+5958

Fixed parameters

<i>Size</i>	<i>Resolution</i>	Λ_{min}	η	n
400 pxl	5.10 kpc	10.25 kpc	0.5	5/3

Free parameters

Λ_{max}	B_{norm}	<i>Integration</i>	n_e
[51, 102, 255, 510] kpc	[0.3,...,5.0] μG	[190, 380, 660] kpc	[9.880, 6.491, 4.385] $\times 10^{-3} \text{ cm}^{-3}$

CARLA J1358+5752

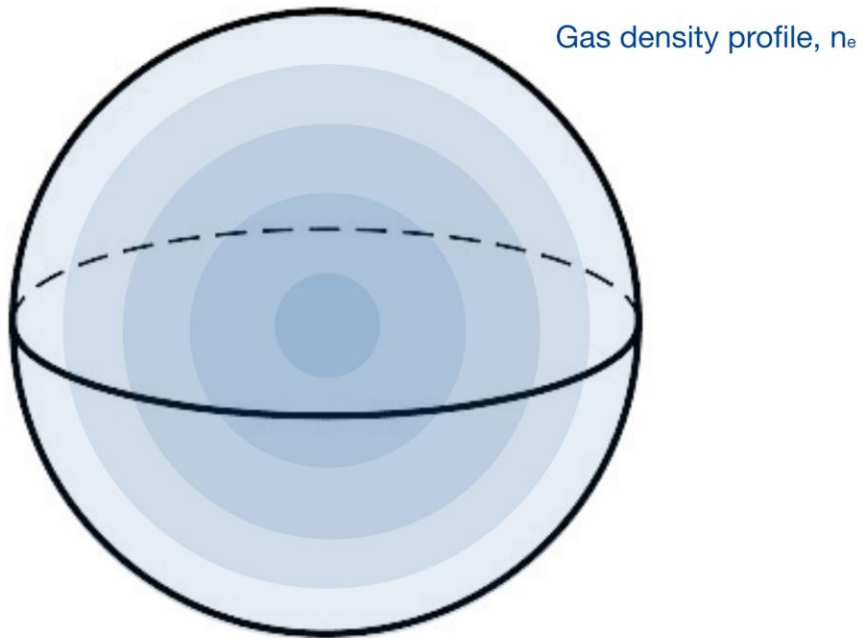
Fixed parameters

<i>Size</i>	<i>Resolution</i>	Λ_{min}	η	n
400 pxl	5.05 kpc	10.15 kpc	0.5	5/3

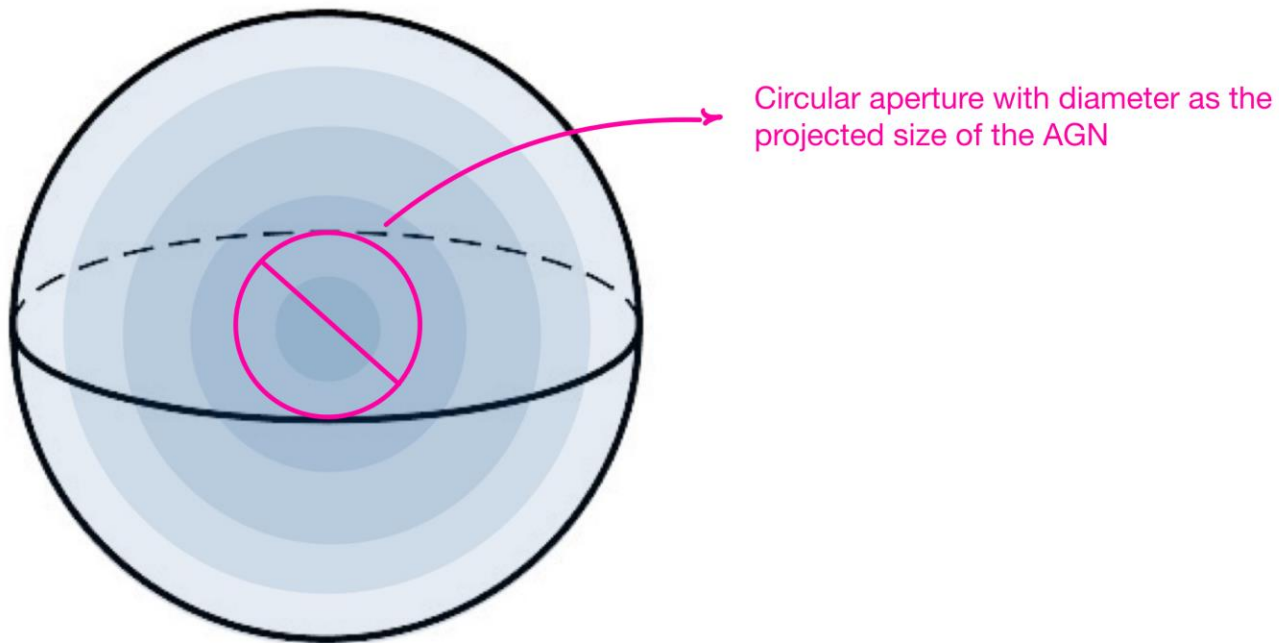
Free parameters

Λ_{max}	B_{norm}	<i>Integration</i>	n_e
[25.25, 50.50, 101, 252.5] kpc	[1.0,...,8.0] μG	[43, 86, 90, 180, 142, 284] kpc	[3.750, 3.696, 3.674, 3.157, 3.368, 2.709] $\times 10^{-3} \text{ cm}^{-3}$

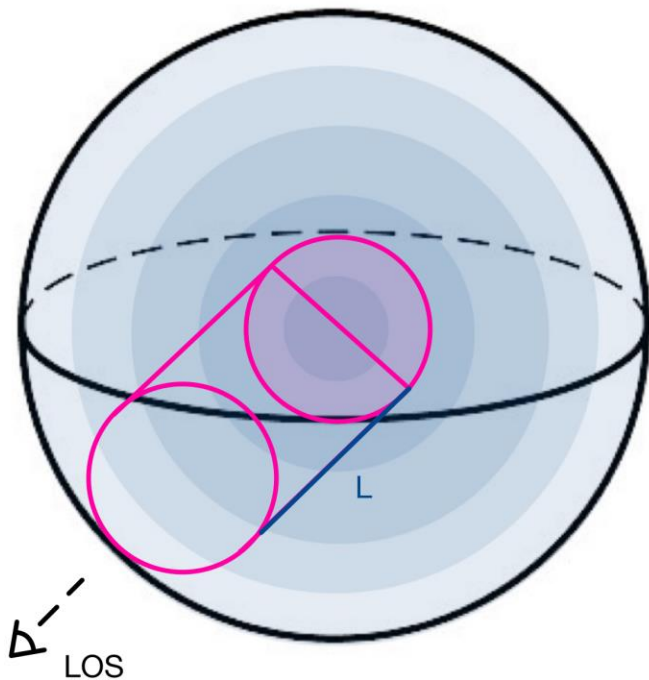
'uniform density that would produce, if projected on a box of depth *integration length*, the same column density of the average cluster profile at that z (integrated over *integration length* and averaged over a circular aperture of diameter *projected size of the central AGN*)'



'uniform density that would produce, if projected on a box of depth *integration length*, the same column density of the average cluster profile at that z (integrated over *integration length* and averaged over a circular aperture of diameter *projected size of the central AGN*)'

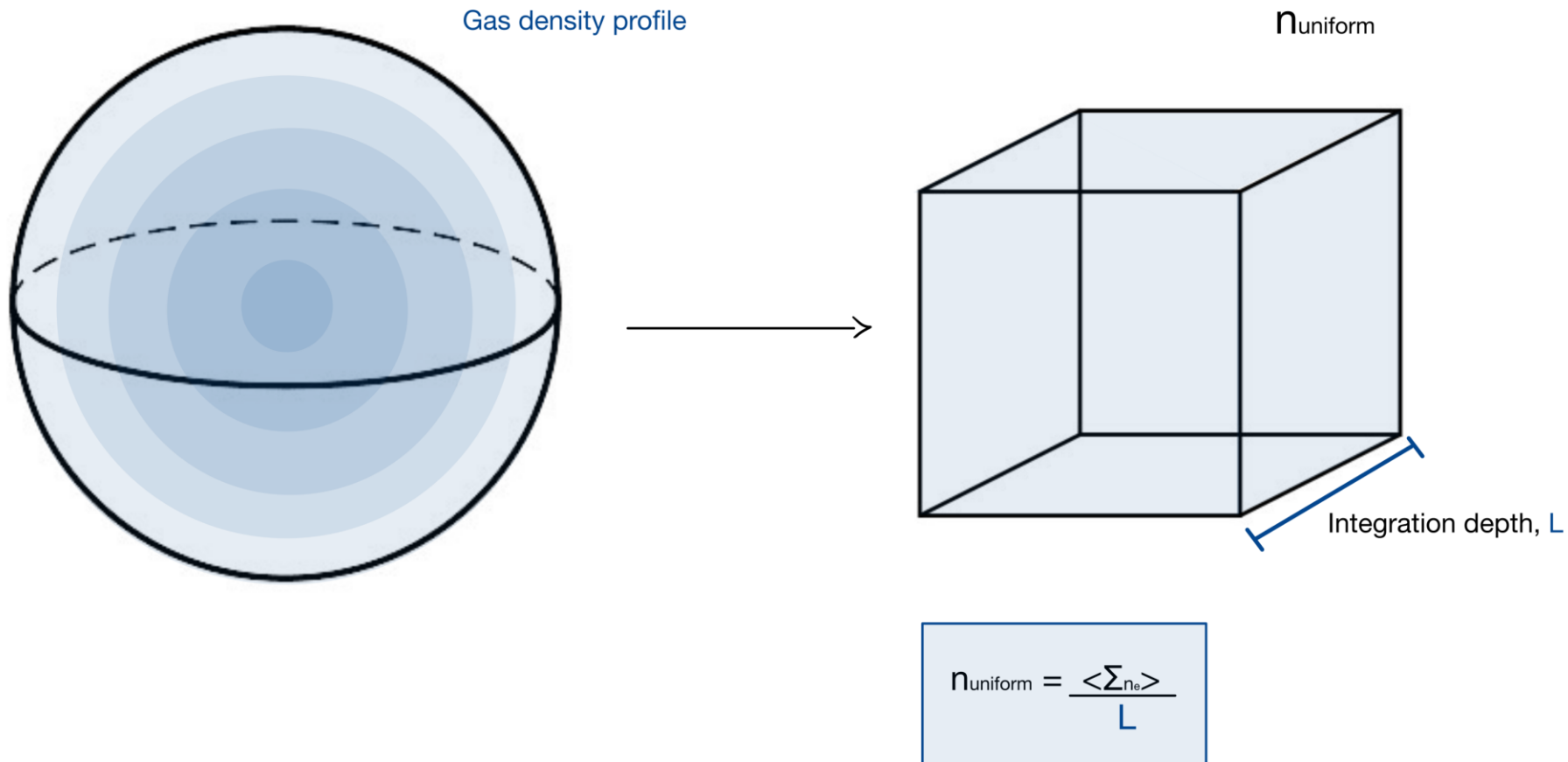


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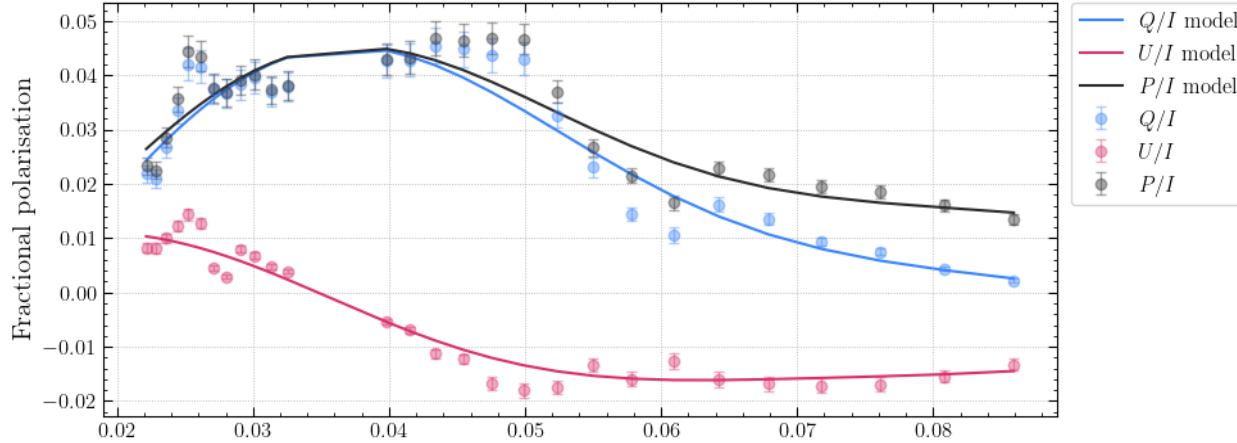
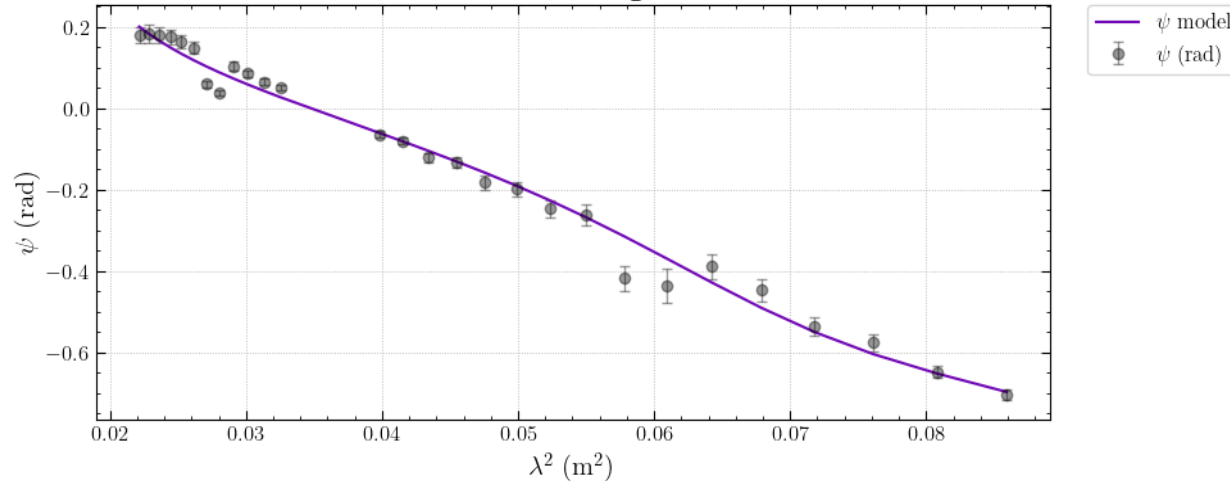


$$\longrightarrow \begin{aligned} 1. \quad \Sigma_{n_e} &= \int_L n_e(r) dl \\ 2. \quad \langle \Sigma_{n_e} \rangle_{\text{aperture}} \end{aligned}$$

'uniform density that would produce, if projected on a box of depth *integration length*, the same column density of the average cluster profile at that *z* (integrated over *integration length* and averaged over a circular aperture of diameter *projected size of the central AGN*)'



CARLA J1510+5958

Fractional Stokes parameters vs λ^2 Polarisation angle vs λ^2 

Single Faraday simple component and **one** component with **differential** Faraday rotation + common **external** dispersion term

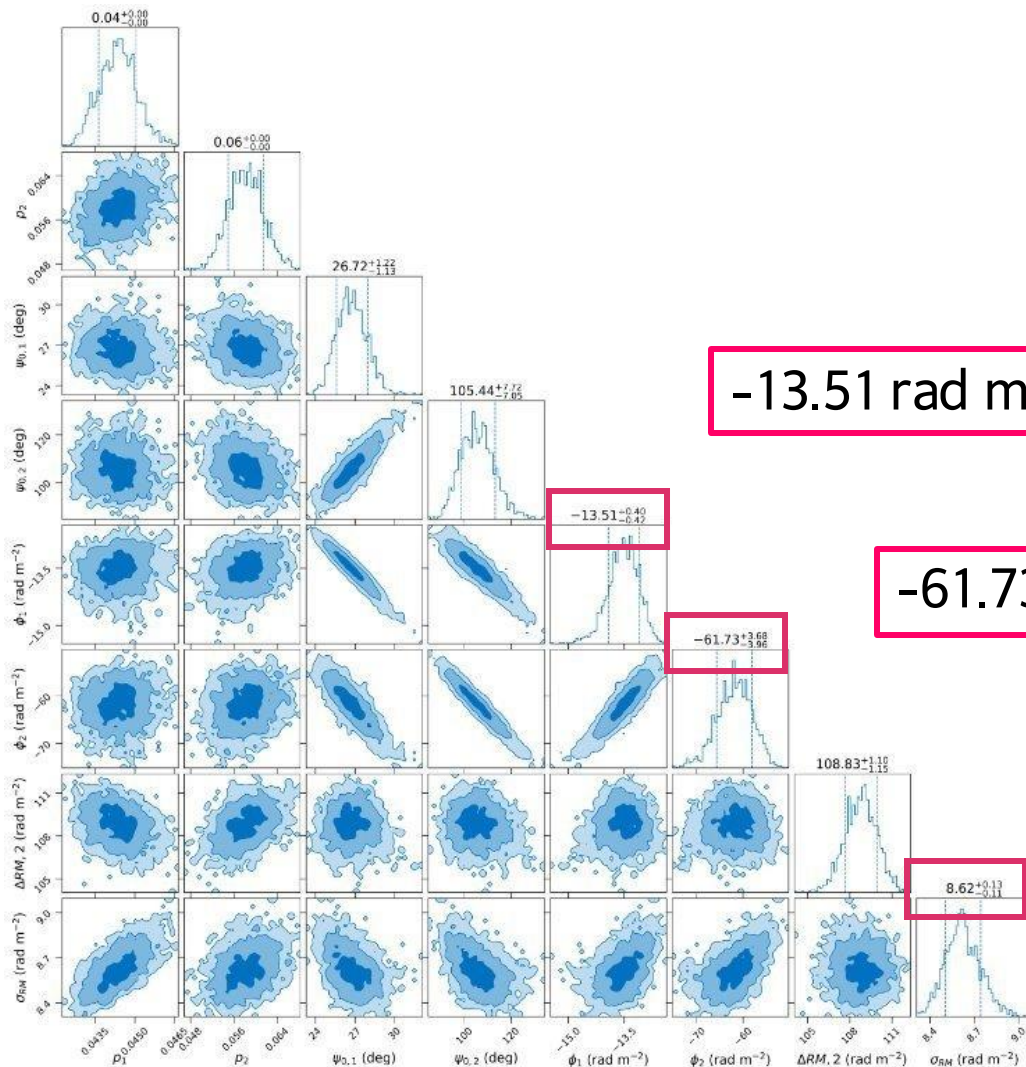
$$p = \{p_{i,1} \cdot \exp[2i(\psi_{0,1} + RM_1 \cdot \lambda^2)] +$$

$$+ p_{i,2} \cdot \exp[2i(\psi_{0,2} + (RM_2 + \frac{1}{2}\Delta RM_2)\lambda^2)] \cdot \frac{\sin(\Delta RM_2 \cdot \lambda^2)}{\Delta RM_2 \cdot \lambda^2} \}$$

$$\cdot \exp(-2\sigma_{RM}^2 \cdot \lambda^4)$$

CARLA J1510+5958

Single Faraday simple component and **one** component with **differential** Faraday rotation + common **external** dispersion term



-13.51 rad m⁻²

-61.73 rad m⁻²

8.62 rad m⁻²

$$p = \{p_{i,1} \cdot \exp[2i(\psi_{0,1} + \text{RM}_1 \cdot \lambda^2)] +$$

$$+ p_{i,2} \cdot \exp[2i(\psi_{0,2} + (\text{RM}_2 + \frac{1}{2}\Delta\text{RM}_2)\lambda^2)] \cdot \frac{\sin(\Delta\text{RM}_2 \cdot \lambda^2)}{\Delta\text{RM}_2 \cdot \lambda^2}\}$$

$$\cdot \exp(-2\sigma_{\text{RM}}^2 \cdot \lambda^4)$$