many and the Netherlands met at Leiden to prepare a possible merging of some of the principal astronomical journals that appeared in Europe [20]. The meeting had been convened by S.R. Pottasch of the Kapteyn Laboratory who, together with A. Reiz of Copenhagen Observatory and J.-L. Steinberg of Meudon Observatory had been the first to explore attitudes with regard to a possible merger; Pottasch and Steinberg were closely connected with editorial work for a journal in their countries. The idea found general support and nine months later, per January 1, 1969, the first issue of the new journal appeared. A statement concerning the creation of the Journal and the relation of its board of Directors to ESO; – a formal agreement between ESO and the Board of Directors; – the contract between ESO and the publisher, Springer Verlag; and accordingly Council authorized the Director General of ESO to sign the contract just mentioned.

The basic idea was, that ESO would make its administrative and legal services available to the Board of the Journal but would carry no financial obligation or responsibility. Apart from making use of ESO’s services, the Board would have an entirely independent status excluding influence from ESO side on its scientific policy. As a trait-d’union between ESO and the Board, the author, at that time Scientific Director of ESO, became a member of the Board of Directors – and was, in fact, chosen as its Chairman. Henceforth, European astronomers would turn to the new Journal for the publication of their work – including that based on observations at La Silla.

References and Notes

Abbreviations used:

EHA = ESO Historical Archives (see The Messenger of December 1988).
FHA = Files Head of Administration at ESO Headquarters.
EIPA = ESO, Historical Photographs Archives.

[11] Strömgren’s letter of Nov. 15 with accompanying Cou Letter 00/2426/68 of Ramberg, and Strömgren’s letter of Nov. 20 with accompanying Cou Letter 00/2464/68 by Manager Bloemkolk, both in FHA Cou and FC Doc’s 1.1.1/1.2.1., Circular Letters.
[12] Letter marked 3137/69 in file FHA 1.1.1/1.2.1.
[14] In FHA, attached to the Report of the Working Group referred to under reference [14]; an English translation was made at the request of Funke according to FHA 1.1.1/1.21, Cou-2 2281/69.
[16] We note that in the W. Group’s report the GPO is not considered as one of the three middle-size telescopes of the Convention, contrary to the decision taken by the ESO Committee in July 1960 as reported in article IV.
[20] A report on this meeting by S.R. Pottasch is in the section Earliest Developments of the Archives.
[22] See minutes of this meeting and Doc. FHA Cou-2 CL 2399 of Nov. 14, 1968.

SN 1990I in the Polar Ring Galaxy NGC 4650 A

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1. A Brief History

On the night of April 29/30, 1990, Oscar Pizarro, night observer assistant at the ESO Schmidt telescope found on an ESO Schmidt B plate taken on 27.1 April 1990, a new, rather luminous object, situated very close to the edge of a quite bright galaxy. The discovery was made by comparing the new plate with an old one taken about 10 years ago. From a first glance at the plate, it was clear that the object was likely to be a new supernova.

The host galaxy turned out to be NGC 4650 A (α = 12h 42m 05s, δ = −40° 26′ 30″, 1950 Equinox) with the object located 14 arcsec east and 47 arcsec south of the galaxy nucleus. Before the end of the same night we managed to obtain 2 CCD frames (B and V filters) at the ESO-MPI 2.2-m telescope. Although the observations were performed at a very high airmass (~2), we succeeded in obtaining quite accurate photometry; the mean values were (29.4 April 1990) V = 15.6 and B = 16.7. Due to the location of the object and to its brightness...
(see Fig. 1) we were confident that we were dealing with a new supernova (Pizarro et al., 1990).

In order to learn the type of this SN, a 30-min. spectrum was obtained the following night (April 30.1) at the ESO 1.52-m telescope equipped with the Boller and Chivens spectrograph attached. The spectrum, flat field corrected and sky subtracted, is shown in Figure 2. By comparing the prominent features between 5400 and 6800 Å with published SN spectra (e.g., Branch et al., 1983) and considering the observed colour index and the absolute magnitude of the SN (Heliocentric velocity of NGC 4650 A = 2904 km sec⁻¹, Whitmore et al., 1987), it appears that SN 1990 I is a supernova of type Ia, ~40 days after the maximum (Pasquini, Jarvis and Leibundgut, 1990).

A careful analysis of published data on type Ib supernovae (Harkness et al., 1987), however, shows that spectra and colours of a Ib supernova ~20 days after maximum can be almost identical to those of a SN Ia which is only few weeks older; we cannot then exclude that SN 1990 I is a Ib SN 2-3 weeks after maximum. For the time being it is not possible to distinguish between these two possibilities by means of optical observations, but the differences between type Ia's and Ib's should be clear ~200 days after maximum. In fact, at that stage, while Ia spectra are dominated by Fell and Fell lines (Meyerott, 1980, Danziger et al., 1990), Ib supernovae show prominent OI lines (Gaskell et al., 1986).

2. SN 1990 I and the Host Galaxy

NGC 4650A is probably one of the best studied polar ring galaxies (Laust-
son and West, 1980, Whitmore et al., 1987); in Figure 1 the ring is visible as a disk-like feature almost oriented north-south and SN 1990I is located close to its southern edge. Although it cannot be excluded that the alignment of the SN 1990I with the polar ring is a projection effect, it is more probable that the SN was really formed in the ring.

The possibility that SN 1990I is of type Ia and is associated with the ring, makes this object particularly interesting, because the ring has quite blue colours, is knotty and very rich in HII regions indicating significant recent star formation (Laustsen and West, 1980); on the other hand, SN type Ia are typical of galaxies in which no young stellar population is present and it is generally agreed that Ia supernovae are associated with a low mass, old population (Woosley et al., 1986).

The location of SN 1990I would not be unusual if, instead, we were dealing with a type Ib, which are thought to have massive progenitors. Since the number of spectroscopically and photometrically well-sampled supernovae Ib is rather small, the follow-up of SN 1990I is very interesting, even if it should turn out not to be of type Ia.

The favourable location of SN 1990I in the sky will allow La Silla observers to follow it during the next 5 months or so.

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References


The Stellar Content of the Dwarf Galaxy NGC 3109

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1. Introduction

Despite their modest appearance, dwarf irregular galaxies (DIGs) form an interesting class of objects in many respects. First, the high mass-to-light ratios measured for the smallest systems make DIGs some of the best candidates for the study of the dark matter content of the universe. Observations suggest that the ratio of hidden-to-luminous matter increases when going from irregular systems such as Sextans.

Figure 1: The SBm galaxy NGC 3109 from an ESO 3.6-m 60-min exposure on Kodak IIIa-J + GG 385.