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A SPATIALLY RESOLVED PLERIONIC X-RAY NEBULA AROUND PSR B0540–69

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ABSTRACT

We present a high resolution *Chandra* X-ray observation of PSR B0540–69, the Crab-like 50 msec pulsar in the Large Magellanic Cloud. We use phase-resolved imaging to decompose the extended X-ray emission, as expected of a synchrotron nebula, from the point-like emission of the pulsar. The image of the pulsed X-ray emission shows a well-defined point-spread function of the observation, while the resolved nebula has a morphology and size remarkably similar to the Crab nebula, including evidence for a jet-like feature from PSR B0540–69. The patchy outer shell, which most likely represents the expanding blast-wave of the supernova, is reminiscent of that seen in radio. Based on morphology, size, and energetics there can be little doubt that SNR B0540–69 is an analogous system to the Crab but located in our neighboring galaxy.

Subject headings: pulsars: general — pulsars: individual (PSR B0540–69) — X-rays: general — supernova remnant — stars: neutron

1. INTRODUCTION

The X-ray-bright 50 ms pulsar PSR B0540–69 was discovered in the N158A nebula of the Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC) and has long been compared to the Crab pulsar (Seward, Harnden, & Helfand 1984). Based on its timing and spectral properties, the two rotation powered pulsars are very similar with a spin period of 50 vs. 33 ms and a spin-down rate of 4.8×10^{-13} vs. 4.0×10^{-13} s/s for PSR B0540–69 and the Crab, respectively. From these quantities, assuming the standard magnetic dipole pulsar model, one can infer a characteristic age (1.7 vs. 1.2 kyr), spin-down energy (2.0×10^{38} vs. 6.5×10^{38} ergs s⁻¹), and surface magnetic field strength (5.0×10^{12} vs. 3.8×10^{12} G) for PSR B0540–69 and the Crab, respectively. This similarity suggests that PSR B0540–69 could be accompanied by a “plerion”, a pulsar driven wind nebula (Weiler & Sramek 1988), reminiscent of that seen for the Crab.

Indeed, there are several lines of evidence indicating the presence of a plerion in the vicinity of PSR B0540–69. Chanan, Helfand, & Reynolds (1984) detected a polarized optical nebula of half-power diameter $\sim 4''$ around the pulsar. This apparent synchrotron nebula was also resolved (though barely) in a radio image presented by Manchester et al. (1993) and in a *ROSAT* high resolution imager observation by Seward & Harnden (1994). Furthermore, the overall X-ray spectrum of PSR B0540–69 and its remnant (SNR B0540–69) is well characterized by a power law, as expected if the emission is predominantly non-thermal (Clark et al. 1982; Wang & Gotthelf 1998a).

The *ROSAT* observation also revealed a faint X-ray emitting shell, ~ 15 pc in size surrounding the pulsar. This shell contributes less than 20% to the total luminosity of $\sim 1.0 \times 10^{37}$ ergs s⁻¹ in the *ROSAT* 0.1–2 keV band and is likely the SNR associated with the pulsar (Seward & Harnden 1994). However, no evidence has yet been found for a similar X-ray-emitting shell or a shell-like SNR around the Crab (e.g. see discussion in Jones et al. 1998).

In this Letter, we report new results on SNR B0540–69 based on a recent observation acquired with the *Chandra* High Resolution Camera. This observation enables us for the first time to distinguish morphological details of the nebula around PSR B0540–69. We analyze phase dependent images and resolve the expected plerion-like nebula from the point-like pulsar emission. This allows us to identify features similar to those seen from the Crab nebula; we present morphological evidence for a torus of X-ray emission, which most likely represents shocked pulsar wind materials and a likely X-ray jet emanating from the pulsar. We discuss the implications of the results in the context of the pulsar-nebula system. Throughout the paper we adopt a distance of 51 kpc for the LMC.

2. OBSERVATION

The *Chandra* observatory (Weisskopf et al. 1996) observed SNR B0540–69 on Aug 31 1999 as part of the initial calibration of the High Resolution Camera (HRC; Murray et al. 1997). A total of 19.4 ksec of data were collected during a portion of the orbit which avoided regions of high background contamination such as from bright Earth and radiation belt passages. The remnant was centered on the on-axis position of the HRC where the point-spread function (PSF) has a half power radius (the radius enclosing 50% of total source counts) of $\sim 0''.5$. Time-tagged photons were acquired with 15.6 μ s precision, and the arrival times were corrected to the solar system barycenter using a beta version of AXBARY available from the *Chandra* X-ray Center FTP site (A. Rots 1999, private communication). While the detector is sensitive to X-rays over a 0.1 – 10.0 keV range, there is essentially no energy information available. We analyzed event data calibrated by the initial processing and dated 1999 September 12, which was made available through the *Chandra* public archive. In addition to the standard processing, the event data was further filtered to reduce the instrumental background and to remove “ghost image” artifacts using a beta version of

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HRC_SCREEN (S. Murray 2000, private communication). We extracted 1024×1024 pixel images centered on the pulsar rebinned by a factor of two from the native HRC pixel size of $0''.13175$ per side.

3. RESULTS

A global view of N158A and its environment as seen by the *Chandra* HRC is shown in Figure 1 (contours) and Figure 2 (greyscale). The large-scale X-ray enhancement on scales up to $\sim 1'$ is the previously resolved shell-like emission (Seward & Harnden 1994). In fact, the X-ray and radio emission together outlines a nearly circular morphology around PSR B0540–69. Clearly, the shell represents the blastwave of SNR B0540–69. The X-ray intensity distribution within the remnant appears rather patchy. While the southwest X-ray enhancement is a good tracer of the radio and optical emission peaks, there is no general correlation between fainter radio and X-ray features.

The superb spatial resolution of the *Chandra* observation further allows for a close-up of the immediate vicinity of PSR B0540–69 (Fig. 2b). The presence of a diffuse plerion-like nebula around the pulsar is apparent. To decompose the nebula emission from the pulsar contribution, we conducted phase-resolved image analysis. This enables us to estimate the local PSF based on the pulsed, point-like emission from the pulsar and to quantify the extended, unpulsed nebula radiation.

First, we must determine the pulse period at the current epoch. We constructed a periodogram around a narrow range of periods centered on the expected period ± 0.1 ms, sampled in increments of $0.05(P^2/T)$, where T is the observation duration, and P is the test period. For each trial period, we folded photons extracted from a $1''0$ aperture centered on the bootstrapped pulsar position (see below) into 20 phase bins and computed the χ^2 of the resultant profile. We find a highly significant signal ($> 56\sigma$) at $P = 50.508132(6)$ ms at Epoch 51421.630741 MJD; the uncertainty is estimated according to the method of Leahy (1987). We have assumed a period derivative of $\dot{P} = 4.789342 \times 10^{-13}$ for the data epoch (Deeter et al. 1999). In Figure 3 we display the resultant light-curve folded at the peak period which, as expected, is roughly sinusoidal and modulated with a $\sim 40\%$ pulse fraction (defined as the amplitude divided by the mean).

Next, we defined two regions in the phase space, on- and off-pulse, by selecting eight adjacent phase bins corresponding to the peak and trough of the pulse profile. The on-pulse image with the off-pulse image subtracted is presented in Figure 4b. This image reproduced the expected PSF with no evidence of asymmetric deviations, as might be caused by poor aspect reconstruction, like that typically found for *ROSAT* images. Figure 5 presents average radial intensity distributions around the centroid of the point-like source.

By subtracting the normalized pulsar image (Fig. 4b), we are able to construct an image of the nebula emission (Fig. 4c) alone. The subtracted image is scaled to compensated for both the relative phase coverage and for a 21% unpulsed emission contribution, estimated by minimize a pointlike contribution at the pulsar position of the nebula image. As shown in Figure 4c, the extended

emission is distinctly different from the pointlike image of the pulsed emission from the pulsar. The primary feature is the NE-SW elongated feature, which is morphologically symmetric relative to the pulsar and extends about $\sim 2''.5$ on both sides of the pulsar. However, the observed emission on the SW side appears twice as strong compared to the NE side, with an average intensity of $\sim 7.5 \times 10^{-2}$ counts s^{-1} arcsec^{-2} . Because the central core of the distribution is significantly brighter than the extended features and the subtraction of the pulsar contribution is somewhat arbitrary, the exact intensity distribution is uncertain.

There is also marginal evidence for a jet-like feature emanating from the pulsar. This emission, most apparent in the NW and extending about $3''$, is nearly perpendicular to the NE-SW elongated nebula and is slightly bent toward North. The integrated emission of the jet-like feature is roughly $\sim 3.1 \times 10^{-2}$ counts s^{-1} . The configuration of the jet feature relative to the nebula is remarkably similar to that of the Crab nebula as seen by *ROSAT* and which is now clearly resolved with *Chandra* (see *Chandra* publicity photo).

In short, the X-ray emission can be decomposed into three major morphological components: a point-like source, the surrounding nebula which shows evidence for a jet feature, and a patchy supernova remnant shell.

4. DISCUSSIONS

A comparison between the X-ray-emitting nebula around PSR B0540–69 and the Crab nebula (see *Chandra* publicity photo³) is very informative. The Crab nebula image shows a torus of X-ray-emitting loops, which most likely represents shocked pulsar wind materials consisting of magnetic waves and ultra-relativistic particles. Also clear are the two jets of X-ray-emitting material emanating from the Crab pulsar, in the direction perpendicular to the major axis of the torus. We speculate that the nebula around PSR B0540–69 has a similar structure. In fact, at the spatial resolution of *Chandra* at the LMC, the size, morphology, and surface intensity of the two nebulae are all remarkably similar (Fig. 2b).

Assuming a power law spectrum for the X-ray emission from the SNR B0540–69 nebula of photon index 2.0 and $N_H = 4 \times 10^{21} \text{cm}^2$ (Finley et al. 1993, Wang & Gotthelf 1998a), the conversion between the count rate and the energy flux in the standard 1.0-10 keV band is $\sim 1 \times 10^{-10}$ ergs $\text{s}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}/\text{counts s}^{-1}$. The corresponding total luminosity of the nebula is $\sim 2.7 \times 10^{37}$ ergs s^{-1} , which is 13% of the spin-down energy of PSR B0540–69. The fraction is again similar to that of the Crab.

N157B (PSR J0537–6910) is the only other LMC SNR with a detected pulsar (16 ms) and also shows both an extended (resolved by *ROSAT* HRI), non-thermal nebula and a partial X-ray-emitting shell (Wang & Gotthelf 1998a; 1998b). The upcoming *Chandra* observations will make a detailed comparison between these two young Crab-like SNRs possible.

We gratefully acknowledge the *Chandra* team for making available the public data used herein. In particular we thank A. Rots and S. Murray for kindly making avail-

³Available at http://xrtpub.harvard.edu/photo/0052/0052_hand.html

TABLE 1
HRC SPATIAL COMPONENTS OF SNR B0540-69

Component ^a	Count Rate ^b	Size and Shape
Pulsar ^c		
pulsed	0.14	point-like
unpulsed	0.18	”
Nebula	0.8	5'' × 3'' NE-SW
Jet	0.03	3'' long SE-NW
SNR Shell	0.2	~ 1' diameter

^aSee §3; ^bCount/s; ^cX-ray emission from a 2'' radius aperture around the pulsar.

able their beta software. We thank U. Hwang for pointing out an instrumental artifact (“ghost image”) in the original HRC image of SNR B0540-69. We thank Dick Manchester for sending us the radio image and Fernando Camilo, David Helfand, and Jules Halpern for carefully

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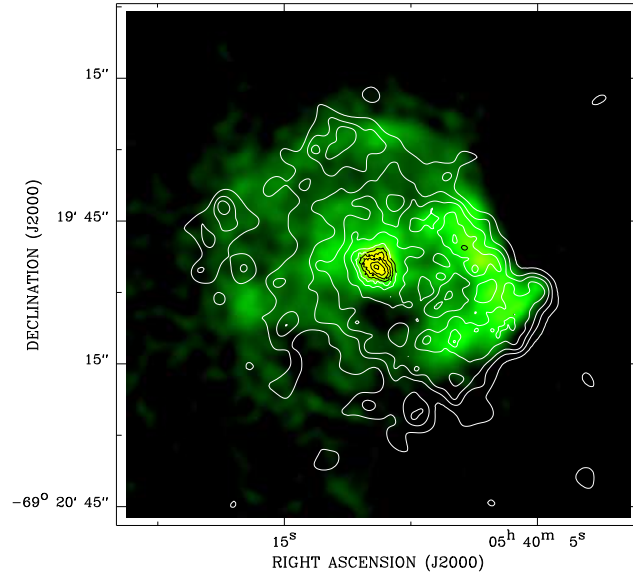


FIG. 1.— The overall X-ray and radio view of the region of SNR 0540-69 containing the central 50 ms pulsar PSR B0540–69. The contours denote the Chandra HRC X-ray intensity distribution; the levels are 0.001, 0.005, 0.008, 0.013, 0.03, 0.1, 0.3, 1., 3, 10, and 30 counts $s^{-1} \text{arcsec}^{-2}$. The greyscale map shows the 6 cm radio emission which traces the approximately circular remnant. The radio map is from Manchester et al. (1993) and has a beam size with half power width of $\sim 5''$.

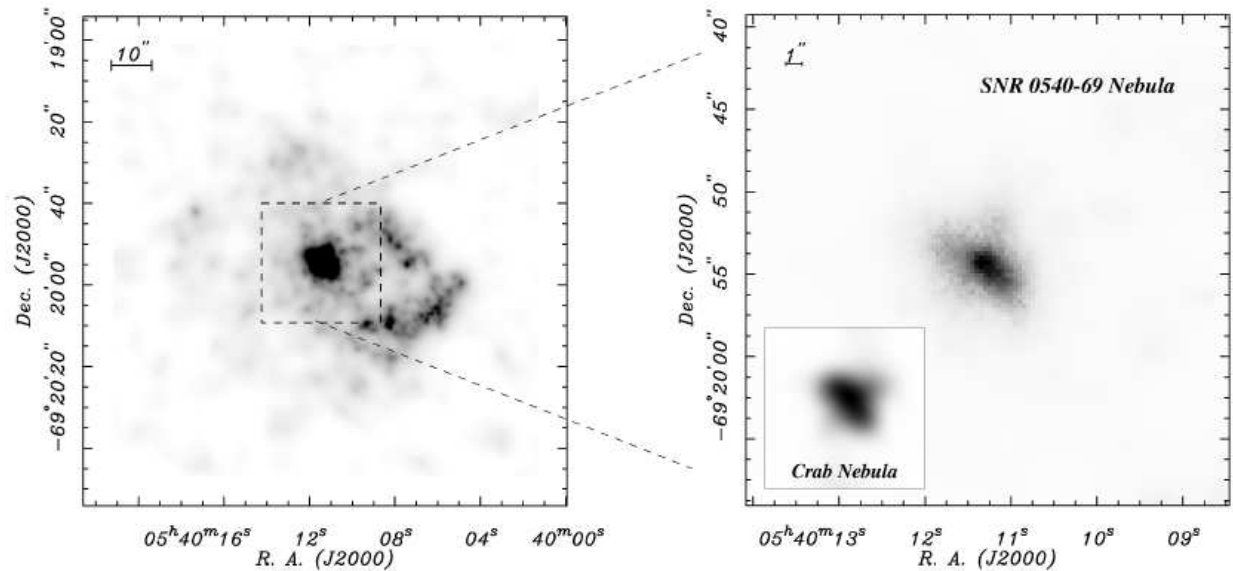


FIG. 2.— X-ray intensity distribution around the region containing the 50 ms pulsar PSR B0540–69. Left Panel) the Chandra HRC broad energy-band image centered on the pulsar. The image has been adaptively smoothed using a minimum signal-to-noise of 6 ratio and the intensity scale chosen to highlight the diffuse SNR emission surrounding the bright pulsar nebula, which is fully saturated in this image. The central box delineates the region enlarged and displayed in the right panel. Right Panel) Close up image around the pulsar, displayed scaled by the square root of intensity. Insert) Crab nebula image, placed at the distance of the LMC (assuming a distance to the Crab of 2 kpc) and blurred to the HRC resolution. Notice the similar size, shape, and overall brightness morphology compared to PSR B0540–69.

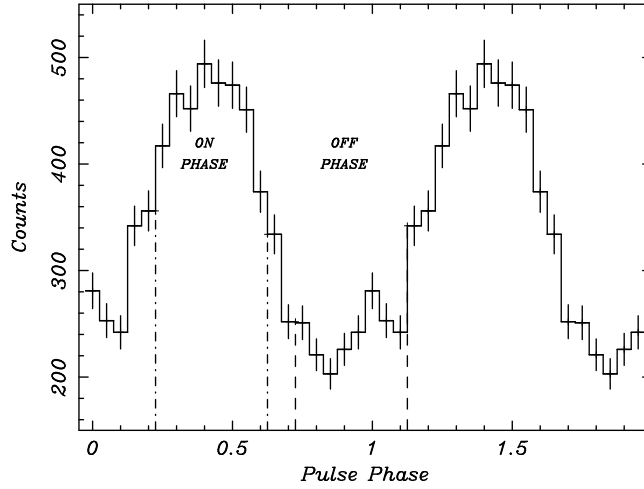


FIG. 3.— HRC light curve (0.4 – 10 keV) for PSR B0540–69 folded at the ephemeris given in the text. Two periods are shown for clarity. The two sets of vertical bars denote the two phase regions (on/off) used to isolate the nebula from the pulsar emission. The light curve has been extracted from a 1'' radius aperture centered on the pulsar.

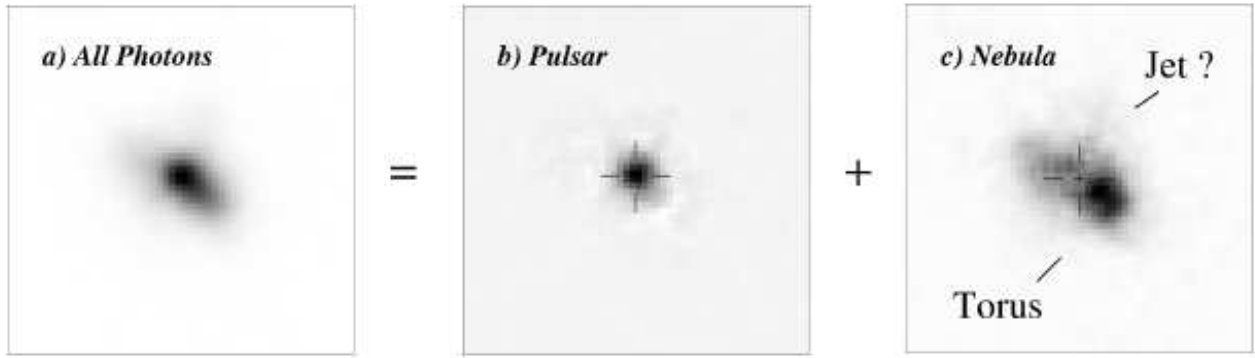


FIG. 4.— Phase-subtracted X-ray intensity maps of PSR B0540–69. Left Panel) Before phase-subtraction, image of the pulsar and nebula (all photons), same as the right panel of figure 2. Middle Panel) the pulsar image containing the pulsed photons only. This is in excellent representation of the HRC point-spread function, consistent with the ground calibration. Right Panel) same region after subtracting the pulsar’s contribution to the total flux (see text for details) – this provides a good estimate of the nebula emission surrounding the pulsar. The cross marks the pulsar’s centroid. The three maps are identically sized and linearly scaled in intensity.

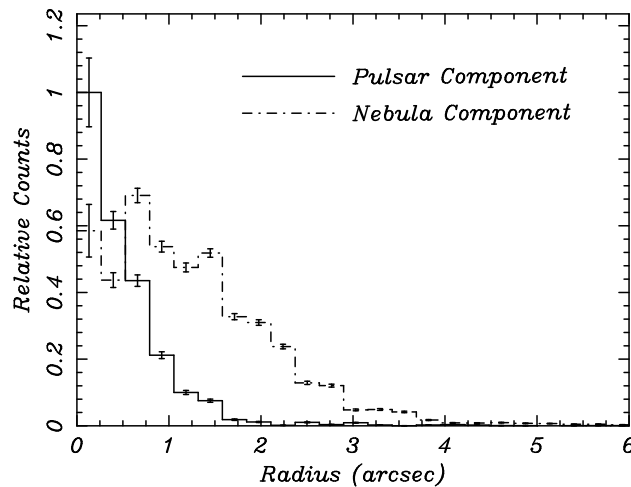


FIG. 5.— HRC radial intensity distributions around the point-like emission peak of PSR B0540–69. The pulsar radial profile (solid line) is consistent with the HRC point-spread function. The nebula profile (dotted line) is significantly extended, the enhancement between 0.1 – 1.5'' is due to the relatively bright SW nebula region.