

Investigating the Nature of the Hard X-ray/Soft Gamma-ray Emission from Centaurus A

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The question of the origin of the hard X-ray/soft gamma-ray emission in Centaurus A (Cen A) persists despite decades of observations. Low energy results from X-ray instruments suggest a jet origin. In contrast, high energy X-ray/soft gamma-ray instruments find electron temperatures indicating a corona origin is possible. We analyzed *INTEGRAL*/IBIS-ISGRI and SPI data and observations over nearly 20 years. We did not find any spectral variability so we combined all observations for long-term average spectra. A *NuSTAR* observation was also added to study the 3.5 keV – 2.2 MeV spectrum. Spectral fits using a CompTT model found $kT_e \sim 520$ keV, near pair-production runaway. The spectrum was also well described by a log-parabola to model synchrotron self-Compton emission from the jet. With the 12-year catalog *Fermi*/LAT spectrum using a log-parabola can explain the data up to ~ 3 GeV. Including a corona spectral component can also well-describe the data, but the parameters are poorly constrained. In this scenario, the hard X-rays/soft gamma-rays are due the corona and the MeV to GeV emission is due to the jet.

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1. Introduction

As one of the brightest radio-loud active galactic nuclei (AGNs) in the hard X-ray sky, Centaurus A (Cen A) has been observed by numerous missions since its first detection in 1969 [3]. Results have shown that the spectral shape does not vary with flux [2, 4, 13, 18, 19]. But there has been a lack of consistency in the spectral shape between different instruments, which has made interpreting the origin of the hard X-ray/soft gamma-ray emission difficult.

The main disagreement is over the location of spectral curvature. Analyses have found spectra well fit with a power-law model with similar spectral indexes. *GRANAT*/SIGMA observations found a power-law spectrum with a slope of 1.9 (35 – 200 keV) with only a weak indication of a spectral break [13]. Observations from *RXTE*/*INTEGRAL* in the 3 – 240 keV range found a power-law spectrum with a slope of 1.83 and no spectral break [18]. Rothschild et al. (2011) analysis using *RXTE* data a slope of 1.822 and no curvature, constraining the cutoff to > 2 MeV [19]. *XMM-Newton*/*NuSTAR* observations found an index of 1.81 and no cutoff < 1 MeV (Furst et al. 2016). Though, the data are consistent with a thermal Comptonization model with an electron temperature $\sim 100 - 300$ keV. All of these spectral turnovers in the above results are well outside the energy ranges of the considered spectra and thus are not able to constrain the spectral break.

Observations at soft γ -ray energies have not fared better at determining where the spectral break is. Joint spectral fits from the OSSE and COMPTEL instruments (50 keV – 30 MeV) found a spectral break at ~ 150 keV and a low energy power-law slope of 1.74 and high energy power-law slope of 2.0 [20]. *INTEGRAL* observations covering 3 – 1000 keV analyzed by [2] can be fit with a cutoff power-law with a photon index of ~ 1.7 and $E_c \sim 400$ keV and excluding cutoff energies below 300 keV and above 700 keV at 3σ . Analysis of *INTEGRAL*/SPI with *Chandra* in the 2 – 500 keV range also found spectral curvature, with a reflection component, and a cutoff energy > 700 keV with a confidence of $> 95\%$ [4].

We report on additional *INTEGRAL* observations of Cen A spanning ~ 20 years to explore the long-term temporal variability and study the soft γ -ray spectrum to investigate the possible high-energy cutoff.

2. Instruments and Observations

2.1 INTEGRAL

The *INTEGRAL* satellite was launched in Oct 2002 from Baikonur, Kazakhstan with an eccentric orbit [12] that has a period of $\sim 2.5 - 3$ days. We analyzed data from both SPI (SPectrometer on-board INTEGRAL [22]) and IBIS/ISGRI (Imager on Board INTEGRAL/INTEGRAL Soft Gamma-Ray Imager [21]). SPI spans the 20 keV – 8 MeV energy range with an energy resolution of 2 – 8 keV [17], and ISGRI covers energies from 15 – 1000 keV.

The SPI data were analyzed using the SPI Data Analysis Interface (SPIDAI)¹ to generate light curves and spectra, which consist of 39 channels over the 20 keV – 2.2 MeV range. The data above 400 keV were corrected for Pulse Shape Discriminator efficiency following the method outlined

¹Publicly available interface developed at IRAP to analyze SPI data. Available by contacting: spidai@irap.omp.eu. See description in Burke et al. [4]

in [16]. The ISGRI data were analyzed with the Offline Scientific Analysis 11.2 (OSA 11.2)² to produce light curves and spectra, which span the 30 – 630 keV range in 43 channels with a 1% systematic error included.

The observations used in this work span from revolution 48 to 2590 (MJD 52705 – 59948 or 2003-03-07 to 2023-01-04) when the source was within 10° from the *INTEGRAL* pointing direction and uses archival data and data from our observing campaign during *INTEGRAL*'s AO-19 observation cycle. Each observation or science window (scw) is $\sim 1800 - 3600$ s. Observations contaminated by solar activity and Earth's radiation belt have been removed. Thus the total exposure time is 5.3 Ms for SPI and 4.6 Ms for ISGRI.

NuSTAR data (from both focal plane detectors, FPMA and FPMB) were reduced using the *nustardas_04May21_v2.1.1* and CALDB version 20220118. We reduced observation 60001081002, taken Aug. 6, 2013, with a cleaned exposure of ~ 51.3 ksec; spectral extraction and the subsequent production of response and ancillary files were performed using the *nuproducts*.

3. Results

3.1 Temporal Variability

To study the temporal behavior of Cen A, we constructed the SPI and ISGRI light curves on an *INTEGRAL* revolution timescale ($\sim 2.5 - 3$ days). Both SPI and ISGRI instruments show similar temporal evolutions with significant flux increases between MJD 54500 and 55000. The source is significantly detected up to the 200 – 400 keV band in SPI and in the 200 – 450 keV band in ISGRI during the mission.

3.2 Spectral Variability

Many authors have reported that Cen A's spectrum does not change with flux [2, 4, 13, 18, 19]. But *Swift*/BAT recently reported spectral softening after 2013 [15]. We searched for spectral variability in the *INTEGRAL* data by fitting the SPI 25 – 70 keV and ISGRI 34 – 68 keV spectra independently to a power-law model. To reduce uncertainties in the fit parameters, we grouped observations close. We fit the spectra to a power-law model. We found that the spectra are consistent with a constant value with no significant variability during the *INTEGRAL* observations. The photon indexes for the two instruments are consistent with a constant value, with the best-fit indexes for both instruments presenting a marginal agreement.

3.3 Average Spectrum

3.3.1 Phenomenological Models

Since no significant spectral variability was found, observations were combined for long-term average spectra to study the high-energy spectrum of Cen A. We included *NuSTAR* observations for data down to lower energies. The *NuSTAR* data were fit first with an absorbed powerlaw model with absorption components for both the galactic absorption (fixed to $2.36 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ [11]) and an intrinsic absorption. The parameters from this fit are $\Gamma \sim 1.8$ with $n_H \sim 8.73 \times 10^{22} \text{ cm}^{-2}$. The Fe

²<https://www.isdc.unige.ch/integral/analysis#Software>

line energy is 6.36 keV with width of 0.08 keV. In subsequent fits, the Fe line energy and width were fixed. To look for a spectral cutoff, we fit the *NuSTAR* spectra to a `zcutoffpl` model. The model better describes the data, indicating curvature is present. Next we applied the `zpowerlaw` model to the SPI and ISGRI data independently. The photon indexes are in perfect agreement between the two instruments for the powerlaw model. Neither spectrum was well described by the model, which over-predicted the fluxes above ~ 150 keV.

Due to the implied presence of curvature in the spectra, we next fit the data with a cutoff power-law model. The χ^2/ν values improved. The fit parameters are in agreement between the two instruments. We performed a joint fit with the two instruments with a cross-instrument normalization with the SPI normalization fixed. The model was still an acceptable fit to the data. Subsequently, we performed a joint fit between the *NuSTAR*, SPI, and ISGRI data covering 3.5–2200 keV. A cutoff power-law model finds a relatively high E_{cut} of ~ 650 keV.

The presence of reflection can result in an artificially high E_{cut} [4]. We used the `pexrav` continuum model to search for a reflection component. The best-fit reflection fraction was $\sim 10^{-7}$ and consistent with 0. So no significant reflection was present.

3.3.2 Physically Motivated Models

To better understand the emission mechanism(s) in this energy range, we fit the data using more physically motivated models. We fit the data to a `CompTT` model. As pointed out in [8], the seed photon temperature is unknown thus they fit their data to a range of seed photon temperatures with extremes of 0.05 keV and 0.5 keV. We fit our data to both values to explore a range of electron temperatures. Both fits find comparable values of $kT_e \sim 520$ keV and $\tau \sim 0.03$. A electron temperatures above 500 keV disfavors a thermal origin [7].

The hard X-ray/soft gamma-ray emission is potentially due to SSC jet emission. So we fit the spectra to a log parabola model, which can model the inverse Comptonization found in *Fermi* blazars (See [5] and ref within). The α value in the `log-parabola` is the slope observed at the pivot energy ($F(E) = N(E/E_{pivot})^{-\alpha-\beta \log(E/E_{pivot})}$). This model also provides a good fit to the data.

4. Discussion

4.1 *NuSTAR*/INTEGRAL Continuum Spectrum

A joint *NuSTAR*/SPI/ISGRI fit has $E_{cut} \sim 650$ keV or $kT_e \sim 520$ keV. This implies a corona near the runaway pair-production zone [6, 7]. These results suggest that the continuum in the hard X-ray is due to SSC emission. But, we are not able to exclude coronal emission as the dominant emission process in the hard X-ray/soft γ -ray band. For example, 3C 273 showed similar Fe line and reflection characteristics and analysis of the hard X-ray/soft gamma-ray spectrum continuum was found to be a combination of coronal plus jet emission [9, 14].

4.2 Joint Fit With *Fermi*/LAT

Following [14], we included *Fermi*/LAT data using the 12-year Data Release 3 catalog fluxes in 8 channels over the 50 MeV – 1 TeV energy range [1]. Joint LAT/HESS analysis found a spectral

break at ~ 3 GeV [10]. Thus, we included a power-law model to fit the data above 3 GeV for a continuum model of `zpowerlw` in fits to the LAT data. We tested a model where the keV to GeV emission is due to the jet (`log-par + zpowerlw`) and found the data are well fit by the model with a power-law required to fit the data above 3 GeV.

Also, we tested a model where the coronal emission dominates the hard X-ray/soft γ -ray emission and the jet component dominates in the MeV range, similar to the scenario presented for 3C 273 in [9] and [14]. We used a (`CompTT + log-par + zpowerlw`) continuum model. Some parameters are poorly constrained due to the lack of data in the MeV range and the GeV power law component, but the quality of the fit is acceptable

5. Conclusion

In this work, we analyzed *INTEGRAL*/ISGRI and SPI observations of Cen A covering roughly 20 years. We first searched for spectral variability on a timescale of \sim months, and did not find any significant deviations from a power-law with a constant value. Building from this result, we constructed a long-term average spectrum up to 2.2 MeV. We included an observation from *NuSTAR*, which provides coverage down to 3.5 keV, to study the X-ray to soft γ -ray spectrum.

Analysis of *NuSTAR*/ISGRI/SPI spectra found a cutoff energy of ~ 650 keV or $kT_e \sim 520 - 550$ keV. The physical interpretation of the hard X-ray/soft γ -ray emission with these values is unclear. The kT_e 's are near the runaway pair-production region for the corona. Another possible scenario is emission from the jet that is well fit by a log-parabola model.

The LAT spectrum in the 50 MeV to 100 GeV range was included to the fit. A `log-par` model explains the spectrum from *NuSTAR* to LAT below ~ 3 GeV as due to the jet. But, the joint spectrum can also be described by a `CompTT` component to try the presence of coronal emission. The results are degenerate, but the fit parameters suggest two general scenarios. One where the X-ray emission is completely due to the corona and the jet emission dominates at MeV/GeV energies. The other is that the jet flux can explain the spectrum from X-rays to the GeV region. Our work favors the jet interpretation as one component can explain the whole emission from keV to LAT and the high kT_e implied by the corona scenario.

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