The enigmatic loop III and the Local Galactic Structure

M. Kun

1Konkoly Observatory of Hungarian Academy of Sciences, H-1525 Budapest, P.O. Box 67, Hungary
e-mail: kun@konkoly.hu

Abstract. The aim of the present study, based on literature data, is to find signatures of the giant radio continuum structure Loop III on the nearby interstellar medium, and search for molecular cloud and star formation, possibly triggered by its expansion. The preliminary results are as follows: (1) The 3D map of the Local Bubble, published by Lallement et al. (2003) suggests that Loop III is probably more distant than the early models had indicated. (2) The molecular clouds at high galactic latitudes in the 2nd Galactic quadrant are probably associated with the neutral/molecular wall of Loop III. (3) Star formation in Lynds 1333 and Lynds 1082 (GF 9) might have been triggered by the expansion of Loop III. (4) The supernova(e), whose explosion produced Loop III, might have been located in the SU Cas association.

Keywords. ISM: bubbles, ISM: structure, (ISM:) supernova remnants, ISM: individual: Loop III

1. Introduction

The giant galactic radio continuum loops, thought to be nearby, old remnants of single or multiple supernovae, were first studied by Berkhuijsen (1971) and Spoelstra (1972). The basic properties of Loop III, revealed by these early radio continuum surveys, are as follows: Galactic coordinates of the centre: \( l \approx 125^\circ, b \approx +15.6^\circ \); Angular diameter: 65°; Estimated distance to the centre: 150 pc; Radius: 85 pc; Estimated age: about 10^6 yrs.

Due to its huge angular diameter Loop III affects most of the lines of sight toward the positive latitude part of the second Galactic quadrant. Nevertheless, it has been clearly identified only as a radio continuum source due to the complexity of the interstellar medium over its surface. Loop III is expected to have profound effects on the structure of the local interstellar matter, and possibly on the recent star formation in our Galactic neighbourhood. Nevertheless, only a few data are available on such effects. In particular, Verschuur (1993) pointed out that Loop III has modified the distribution of the high-velocity gas at its high-latitude boundaries, demonstrating that the high-velocity hydrogen clouds are local objects.

The aim of the present study, based on literature data, is to find further signatures of Loop III on the nearby interstellar medium, identify interstellar atomic and molecular clouds connected with it, and search for star formation possibly triggered by its expansion.

2. Signatures of Loop III in the distribution of local ISM

Loop III and the Local Bubble. The distance of 150 pc, obtained by Spoelstra (1972), is based on van der Laan’s (1962) theory of expanding supernova remnants. In the light of more recent theories of supernova shells (e.g., Asvarov 2006) this value is rather uncertain. If the centre of Loop III were at 150 pc from the Sun, its near wall should be as close as about 65 pc to us, thus a region of its interaction with the Local...
Bubble (LB) could be identified at such a distance. A detailed 3D map of the LB was published by Lallement et al. (2003). Their Fig. 9, displaying the cross section of this map in the Galactic plane, demonstrates that the extension of LB is larger than 100 pc toward the 2nd quadrant, suggesting a larger distance for Loop III. The authors also plotted an assumed position of Loop III at larger distance and closer to the Galactic anticentre than indicated by the radio continuum observations. If we accept the position and angular diameter of Loop III, determined by these observations, and assume that the boundary of LB, found by Lallement et al. (2003), is defined by its intersection with Loop III in the second quadrant, we obtain 250 pc for the probable distance to the centre and about 140 pc for its radius. Figure 1 shows this hypothetical Loop III, overplotted on Lallement et al.’s (2003) Fig. 9 as a dashed circle.

**HI and molecular clouds associated with Loop III.** Nearby interstellar structures, projected within Loop III, are displayed in the left panel of Fig. 2. The distribution of the neutral hydrogen, \( \int T_d v \sin |b| \), obtained from the Leiden–Dwingeloo survey data base (Hartmann & Burton 1997), is displayed for the radial velocity interval of \(-8\text{ km s}^{-1} < v_{\text{LSR}} < 8\text{ km s}^{-1}\). Positions of the most prominent molecular clouds/complexes and the probable members of the SU Cas association (see below), are also indicated.

Large-scale CO maps by Dame, Hartmann & Thaddeus (2001), Heithausen & Thaddeus (1990), and Heithausen et al. (1993) show that molecular gas can be found over the whole area of Loop III. Table 1 lists the Galactic positions and distances of these molecular clouds/complexes, and the literature sources of their distances. The most prominent molecular structure projected within the boundary of Loop III is the Cepheus flare. Recently Olano, Meschin & Niemela (2006) established that the interstellar gas in the Cepheus flare is distributed over the surface of an expanding shell (Cepheus flare shell, CFS), centred on \( l \sim 124^\circ, b \sim +17^\circ \) and at a distance of 300 pc, and having a radius of about 50 pc. According to Olano, Meschin & Niemela (2006), all these quantities are rather uncertain estimates. As most of the molecular clouds in the Cepheus flare region are found at 200 and 300 pc (Kun 1998), the true distance to the centre of this shell may well be about 250 pc, suggesting that Loop III and CFS are nearly concentric and possibly identical.

Another prominent molecular complex, the Polaris flare, is located at a distance of \( \sim 110 \) pc, and thus probably is associated with the near boundary of Loop III. At the highest Galactic latitude segment the North Celestial Pole Loop (Meyerdierks, Heithausen &
Reif 1991) closely follows the boundary of Loop III. The Camelopardalis clouds are located at the high-longitude, low-latitude boundary of Loop III. According to Zdanavičius et al. (1996) absorbing matter can be found between 100 and 300 pc in this direction, demonstrating that the line of sight is parallel to the wall of Loop III.

**Star formation possibly triggered by Loop III.** In the right panel of Fig. 2 the distribution of the nearby HI shells projected on the Galactic plane, adopted from Heiles (1998), is plotted and supplemented by the position of Loop III and the Cepheus flare shell. The distribution of the molecular clouds of the region is shown as well. Most star forming (possibly older) molecular clouds can be found inside Loop III, whereas the non-star forming (younger) ones are located close to its present surface, suggesting that star formation had been initiated by the expansion of the shell. The trigger by Loop III is conspicuous in the case of L 1333 (see Kun et al. 2006). Another candidate is the L 1082 (GF9, Schneider & Elmegreen 1979), located close to the boundary of Loop III in both projections, in which very early stages of star formation can be observed (Wiesemeyer, Güsten & Wright 1997).

**Possible origin of Loop III.** The stars plotted in the left panel of Fig. 2 are late B–early A type members of the SU Cas association (Turner & Evans 1984) and a few other stars similar in spectral type, proper motion and distance modulus to the association members. The supernova(e), whose explosion(s) produced Loop III, might have been high-mass member(s) of this association.

### 3. Conclusion

The preliminary results presented in this paper suggest that careful studies of the available data on the spatial and velocity distribution of the interstellar structures may reveal several connections which combine them into a coherent structure.
Table 1. Molecular cloud distances in the 2nd Galactic quadrant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cloud</th>
<th>1 (°)</th>
<th>b (°)</th>
<th>D (pc)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draco</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynds 1082 (GF 9)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>100–150</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cepheus flare</td>
<td>100–120</td>
<td>10–20</td>
<td>200 and 300</td>
<td>(3), (4), (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polaris flare</td>
<td>118–126</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>105 &lt; D &lt; 125</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynds 1274</td>
<td>118.1</td>
<td>+8.8</td>
<td>200 ± 30</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khavtassi 15</td>
<td>122.7</td>
<td>+9.6</td>
<td>250 ± 25</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ursa Major</td>
<td>141.8</td>
<td>+35.9</td>
<td>100 &lt; D &lt; 120</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camelopardalis clouds</td>
<td>140–150</td>
<td>0–10</td>
<td>100–300</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynds 1333</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>180 ± 30</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References: (1) Lallement et al. (2003); (2) Wiesemeyer, Güsten & Wright (1997); (3) Straizys et al. (1992); (4) Kun (1998); (5) Olano, Meschin & Niemela (2006); (6) Zagury, Boulanger & Banchet (1999); (7) Nikolić et al. (2001); (8) Kiss, Tóth, Sato et al. (2000); (9) Penprase (1993); (10) Zdanavičius et al. (1996); (11) Obayashi, Kun, Sato et al. (1998)

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References

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Discussion

MAC LOW: 1. Has this loop been detected in more recent surveys, such as the sensitive Wisconsin H-α mapper survey, or more recent continuum surveys? 2. Might Loop III actually be a superposition of unrelated objects in a low resolution survey?

BOULANGER: (answered for M. Kun) Loop III is well detected as a coherent structure in emission and polarization in the 23 GHz synchrotron maps provided by the Cosmic Microwave Background Probe WMAP (Page et al. 2006). HI gas at $V_{LSR} < -20 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ is seen over the sky area interior to the synchrotron loop.