

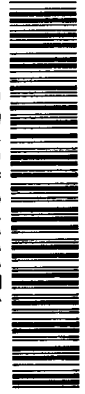
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**Abstract**

We present preliminary results of an *ASCA* observation of the classic soft-excess quasar PG1211+143. The overall *ASCA* spectrum can be characterized by a blackbody with a temperature of  $\sim 125$  eV (quasar frame) and a power law with photon index  $\sim 2$ . Simultaneous *ROSAT* data are suggestive of further steepening of the spectrum just below the *ASCA* band. Comparison with previous observations shows that the soft flux in the 0.1–2 keV band varies by at least a factor of  $\sim 16$ , scaling roughly as the square of the hard flux in the 2–10 keV band over a timescale of  $\sim 13.5$  years. We also find evidence of short-term amplitude variability of up to a factor  $\sim 2$  on a timescale of  $\sim 2 \times 10^4$  s, in both the soft and hard flux so that the soft and hard photons are likely to originate from the same, compact, region. The data rule out variable absorption (cold or ionized) as the origin of the soft excess, favoring an intrinsic emission component. However, we argue against optically thin emission for the ‘blue bump’ in PG 1211+143. The large amplitude soft X-ray variability may be indicative of variations in the effective temperature, or peak, of the soft component. There is only marginal evidence for Fe K line emission between 6–7 keV in the quasar frame.

**Keywords:** Quasars: individual (PG1211+143) – X-rays: sources – X-rays: spectra

## 1. Introduction

The quasar PG 1211+143 ( $z = 0.085$ ) is a classic example of an AGN with a particularly prominent UV / soft X-ray excess, or ‘big blue bump’ (Bechtold *et al.* 1987; Elvis *et al.* 1991; Comastri *et al.* 1992; Saxton *et al.* 1993). The source has a moderately high luminosity ( $\sim 1 - 3 \times 10^{44}$  ergs  $s^{-1}$  in the 2–10 keV band) and is the only one of 33 quasars with soft X-ray spectra in the *Einstein* IPC survey to be dominated by an extremely steep, soft X-ray spectrum (Wilkes and Elvis 1987). Amongst a set of *Einstein* and *EXOSAT* observations, the soft flux has been observed to vary on a timescale as short as  $\sim 18$  days (an increase by a factor of  $\sim 2.3$ ) and the same data set hinted at a correlation between the soft and hard X-ray flux (Elvis *et al.* 1991). Despite the extensive study of soft excesses in this and many other AGN, there is still no consensus as to their origin. This has mainly been due to the lack of X-ray detectors with good resolution combined with a broad bandpass required to simultaneously characterize the soft and hard emission components. The most popular interpretation of the soft excesses still appears to be the thermal emission expected from a geometrically thin, optically thick accretion disk (possibly modified by Comptonization; e.g. see Ross *et al.* 1992). It has been argued by Elvis *et al.* (1991) that an optically thin thermal source cannot account for variability of the soft flux on the 18-day timescale mentioned above. However, it has been counter-argued that this is not true if the source consists of a large number of small emitters instead of a single, uniform emission region (Barvainis 1993). Both thin and thick (e.g. Guilbert and Rees 1988) models envisage reprocessing of hard X-rays into the bump photons but the extent of such reprocessing is at present unclear.

## 2. The *ASCA* Data

PG1211+143 was observed by *ASCA* on 1993 June 3. *ASCA* has four identical, thin-foil, light-weight X-ray telescopes (XRT) which focus X-rays onto one of two Solid-state

Imaging Spectrometers (SIS) or one of two Gas Imaging Spectrometers (GIS:- see Ohashi *et al.* 1991). See Tanaka *et al.* (1994) for a summary of the *ASCA* mission and focal-plane detectors. The SIS sensors, each one consisting of four CCD (Charge Coupled Device) chips were operated in a mode in which all four chips were exposed (4-CCD mode). SIS data from FAINT and BRIGHT modes were combined. Only data from one chip (which contains the majority of the counts) from each SIS is analysed here. Hereafter the two SIS sensors are referred to as S0 and S1 and the two GIS sensors as S2 and S3. Spectra were extracted from each sensor from a circular region centered on the source (typically 3' in radius for the SIS and 5' for the GIS). Background spectra were taken from annuli centered on the source but far enough away to avoid contamination from the source (suitable radii were selected by examining the radial profile). The background constitutes  $\sim 3 - 4\%$  of the total in the SIS and  $\sim 7 - 9\%$  of the total in the GIS. The duration of the observation was about  $8.5 \times 10^4$  s. Data were rejected by (i) removing 'hot' and 'flickering' pixels in the SIS, (ii) examining light curves of off-source regions to select good time intervals when the background is not high and/or variable, (iii) imposing a minimum geomagnetic cut-off rigidity of 8 GeV/c, and (iv) imposing a minimum Earth elevation angle of  $15^\circ$  for obtaining SIS spectra and  $5^\circ$  for the GIS and also for SIS light curves. Method (ii) is also good for rejecting data affected by light leakage in the SIS allowing lower minimum Earth elevation angles to be used. These rather strict selection criteria gave  $\sim 2.3 - 2.6 \times 10^4$  s effective exposure time for SIS spectra and  $\sim 3 \times 10^4$  s for GIS spectra.

### 3. Light Curves

Figures 1a and 1b show the light curves from S2 and S3 respectively (in the 0.8–10 keV band), while Figure 1c shows the light curve from S0 in the 0.4–2 keV band and Figure 1d the light curve from S0 in the 2–10 keV band. The points in the light curve were computed from the count rates in the final, merged good time intervals after data

selection so the bin size is variable, ranging from  $\sim 300$  to 2000 seconds. Using a fixed bin size makes it difficult to detect variability if the bins are too small and variability can be ‘washed out’ if the bins are too large. All the light curves in Figure 1 show significant variability. In particular, the flux increases by almost a factor of 2 in  $\sim 2 \times 10^4$  s near the beginning of the observation. This behavior is present in all four detectors. The soft and hard flux in S0 appears to show correlated variability in the first half of the observation but not in the second. Light curves from S1 are consistent with S0. We have checked whether the apparent variability is due to the slight variation of the source centroid on the detector focal plane (typically much less than  $1'$ ). No correlation is found between the position of the source centroid and the distance from the XRT optical axis. We also find no correlation of the variability with the small attitude variations of the satellite (up to  $\sim 1'$  in both RA and DEC). This, together with the fact that the variability is present in all detectors suggests that the observed variability is indeed due to the source. This short-term variability implies that both the soft and hard emission originates in a compact region of size  $\sim 6 \times 10^{14}$  cm or less. In the optically thin scenario, the ensemble of cloudlets must be confined to this region.

#### 4. Spectral Fitting Results

In this section we bin the spectra to have a minimum of 20 counts per bin, in order to use the  $\chi^2$  statistic and apply background subtraction. We use data in the  $\sim 0.4 - 10$  keV for the SIS and  $\sim 0.8 - 10$  keV for the GIS. Preliminary spectral fitting showed that no simple, single component model could adequately fit the SIS spectra. A single power-law plus absorber fit gave  $\chi^2 = 178.6$  (95 degrees of freedom) for S0 and  $\chi^2 = 142.8$  (89 degrees of freedom) for S1, rejecting the model at greater than 99.9% confidence in both cases. Also, the best-fitting absorbing column was zero in both cases.

Next we fit the data with a power-law plus blackbody model. An absorbing column is included, fixed at the Galactic value of  $2.83 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  (Elvis *et al.* 1989) and the cross-sections in Morrison and McCammon (1983) are used. The model is applied to the spectra from S0 and S1 individually, S0 and S1 simultaneously and finally, all four instruments simultaneously (S0–S3). Only the continuum normalizations are independent in the simultaneous fits. Good fits are obtained in all cases and the results are shown in Table 1. The individual fits to S0 and S1 show consistent results, as do the simultaneous fits. Three instrument fits with S0, S1 and GIS spectra from either S2 or S3 also give consistent results. If we include an additional (floating) column density in any of the fits,  $\chi^2$  decreases by less than 0.01 and the additional column is always much less than  $10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . For the four instrument fit, the data, best-fitting model and ratios of data to model are shown in Figures 2a (SIS) and 2b (GIS). The best-fitting power-law index,  $\Gamma \sim 2$  is consistent with previous measurements with *EXOSAT* (Comastri *et al.* 1992; Saxton *et al.* 1993) and *Ginga* (Williams *et al.* 1992). Comparison with previous measurements of the best-fitting blackbody temperature,  $kT \sim 125 \text{ eV}$ , is not straight-forward due to the different column densities used in the literature and different instrumental bandpasses. A four-instrument fit with a Raymond-Smith plus power-law model gives extremely low abundances ( $0.005_{-0.004}^{+0.005}$  relative to solar) due to the lack of emission lines in the spectra. The resulting quasar-frame plasma temperature from such a fit is  $287_{-17}^{+31} \text{ eV}$ . Note that no systematic errors to account for known instrumental uncertainties, of the order of  $\sim 5 - 20$  % at various energies, have been included in these fits. In particular, the residuals in the SIS below  $\sim 0.6 \text{ keV}$  are seen in data from other sources (e.g. see Yaqoob *et al.* 1994).

Examination of the data to model ratios between 5–7 keV for both SIS and GIS in Figure 2 shows that there may be an Fe K line present in the spectrum. No instrumental effect is known which could produce these residuals (e.g. see Yaqoob *et al.* 1994 for a comparison with 3C 273), nor can the background account for them. If we add a Gaussian

component to the power-law plus blackbody four-instrument model, with fixed center energy and intrinsic width (6.4 keV and 0.1 keV in the quasar frame, respectively) we obtain a best-fitting observed equivalent width of 198 eV (1 parameter, 90% confidence range of 55–341 eV). However, the improvement in  $\chi^2$  is only 8.8 for one additional free parameter, though this is still greater than 99% significance. Note that the ratio of line-intensity to continuum normalization is constrained to be the same for each instrument. If we let the center energy and intrinsic width float, we get best-fitting values of  $\sim 6.6$  keV and  $\sim 0.48$  keV respectively, though neither parameter is well-constrained. Further observations will be necessary to investigate the putative line-emission in order to constrain models of the central engine.

### 5. Spectral Variability

From the *ASCA* data we estimate a mean 2–10 keV flux ( $F_{2-10}$ ) of  $3.4 \times 10^{-12}$  ergs  $\text{cm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , corresponding to a 2–10 keV *quasar-frame* luminosity of  $\sim 1.1 \times 10^{44}$  ergs  $\text{s}^{-1}$  ( $H_0 = 50 \text{ km s}^{-1} \text{ Mpc}^{-1}$  and  $q_0 = 0$ ). We estimate the *extrapolated ASCA* 0.1–2 keV flux ( $F_{0.1-2}$ ) to be  $\sim 6.2 \times 10^{-12}$  ergs  $\text{cm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ . Figure 3 shows the best-fitting *ASCA* power-law plus blackbody model, compared with the best-fitting power-law models to low-energy IPC and high-energy IPC plus MPC data from an observation in December 1980 (taken from Bechtold *et al.* 1987). *ROSAT* PSPC data, simultaneous with the latter  $\sim 4 \times 10^4$  s of the *ASCA* observation, also exist. Simultaneous fitting of the *ASCA*/PSPC data requires the spectrum to be steeper below the *ASCA* band than spectral fitting to the *ASCA* data alone would suggest. For example, Figure 3 (dashed line) shows the result of a five-instrument fit with two blackbodies plus a power law (mimicking a Comptonized blackbody spectrum), giving  $kT_1 = 46$  eV,  $kT_2 = 136$  eV,  $\Gamma = 1.96$  and  $\chi^2 = 565.7$  (542 d.o.f.). We stress that this does not take into account any possible temporal gain variations of the PSPC and that a full discussion of more physical models of the broadband spectrum



and cross-calibration issues will be reported elsewhere. Here we simply note that, with the addition of the PSPC data, the above model gives values of  $F_{0.1-2}$  and  $F_{2-10}$  of 8.0 and  $3.5 \times 10^{-12}$  ergs cm $^{-2}$  s $^{-1}$  respectively. It is evident that PG1211+143 underwent dramatic spectral and amplitude variability between the times of the IPC/MPC and *ASCA* observations. Figure 4 shows a plot of  $F_{0.1-2}$  versus  $F_{2-10}$  from the IPC/MPC data, three *EXOSAT* observations (Saxton *et al.* 1993) and the present *ASCA* observation (with and without the PSPC data), spanning a total of  $\sim 13.5$  years. The soft flux varies by a factor of  $\sim 16$  while the hard flux only varies by a factor of  $\sim 3$ . A linear fit of  $\log(F_{0.1-2})$  versus  $\log(F_{2-10})$  using the *ASCA*-only point gives  $F_{0.1-2} = 0.56F_{2-10}^{2.24}$  and  $F_{0.1-2} = 0.73F_{2-10}^{2.12}$  using the *ASCA*/PSPC point (the correlation coefficients are 0.93 and 0.92 respectively).

## 6. Conclusions

We can now rule out several alternative origins of the soft excess in PG 1211+143 which have been viable contenders in the past. First, variable cold and/or complex absorption can be eliminated as this would have been detected in the *ASCA* observation in which the absorption would have been largest. Warm absorber fits to the *ASCA* data show that the material has to be almost fully ionized. Since the *ASCA* data pertain to a low intensity state of PG 1211+143, the spectral change required in higher intensity states cannot be accounted for by a simple warm absorber. We have also shown that the data rule out a blend of soft X-ray lines as the dominant source of the soft excess. Thus the soft X-rays must constitute an intrinsic emission component. Historical data spanning over a decade in the optical (Maoz *et al.* 1994; Yates & Garden 1989 and references therein) and UV (Bechtold *et al.* 1987; Walter & Courvoisier 1992) show much less than a factor of two variability. The amplitude and variability timescale of the soft X-rays, on the other hand, argue against optically thin emission for the ‘blue bump’. Finally, a robust hard photon index of  $\Gamma \sim 2$  in the face of large amplitude X-ray variability is

consistent with both saturated ‘pair-cascade’ models (e.g. Zdziarski *et al.* 1990) and two-phase thermal Comptonization models (e.g. Haardt & Maraschi 1991). In the former, differential variability in the soft and hard X-rays is possible without a change in the effective temperature, or peak, of the seed soft photon distribution (e.g. see Yaqoob 1992) whereas the latter *does* require a change in the effective temperature in order to account for spectral variability. This is because for a given soft photon temperature and optical depth (giving a particular value of  $\Gamma$ ) the overall spectral shape is fixed (see Haardt & Maraschi 1991).

We wish to thank all the members of the *ASCA* team who have made this work possible. We also thank Matt Malkan for useful discussions. TY, PJS and RF thank the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science for their hospitality during an extended stay when part of this work was done.

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Table 1. Power law plus blackbody fits to PG1211+143

DET	$\Gamma$	$kT$ (eV)	$\chi^2$ (d.o.f.)
S0	1.96 (1.84–2.08)	126 (117–136)	88.8 (94)
S1	2.10 (1.95–2.25)	124 (110–137)	114.6 (88)
S0,S1	2.01 (1.92–2.11)	126 (118–133)	206.1 (184)
All	2.01 (1.95–2.07)	126 (119–133)	491.1 (476)

Parentheses indicate 90% confidence intervals for two interesting parameters (see Lampton, Margon & Bowyer 1976).

## Figure Captions

### Figure 1

(a) The 0.8–10 keV light curve from S2. (b) As (a) but for S3. (c) The 0.4–2 keV light curve from S0. (d) The 2–10 keV light curve from S0.

### Figure 2

The data, best-fitting power-law plus blackbody model and the ratios of data to model for the four instrument simultaneous fitting. The SIS data (a) are shown separated from the GIS data (b) for clarity.

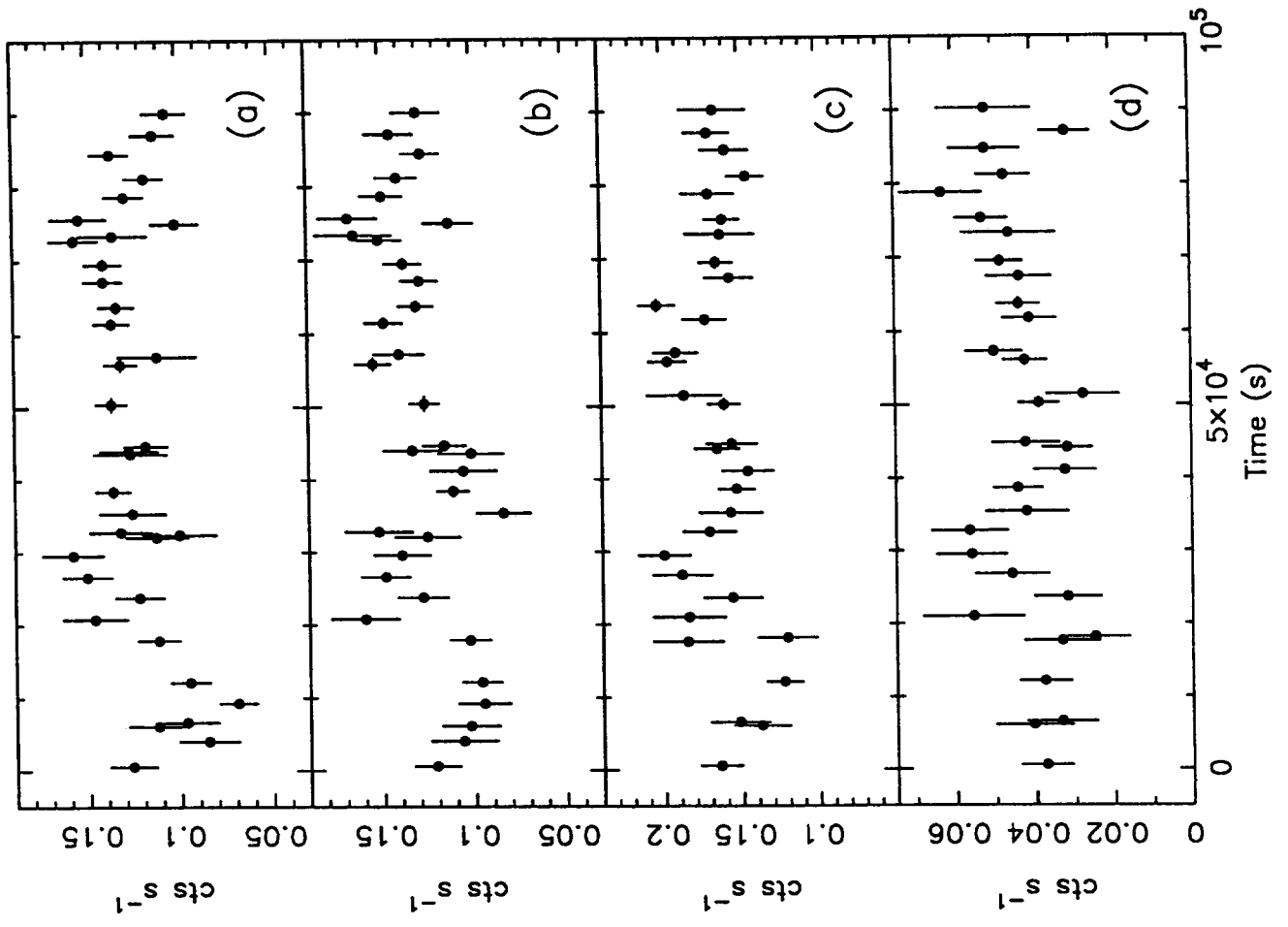
### Figure 3

Best-fitting observed models from IPC/MPC, *ASCA* and *ROSAT* data (see text). Dotted line is the extrapolated *ASCA* model.

### Figure 4

The 0.1–2 keV flux plotted against the 2–10 keV flux from various instruments and the best-fitting power law, excluding PSPC data (see text). Both fluxes are in units of  $10^{-12}$  ergs  $\text{cm}^{-2}$   $\text{s}^{-1}$ .





Figure





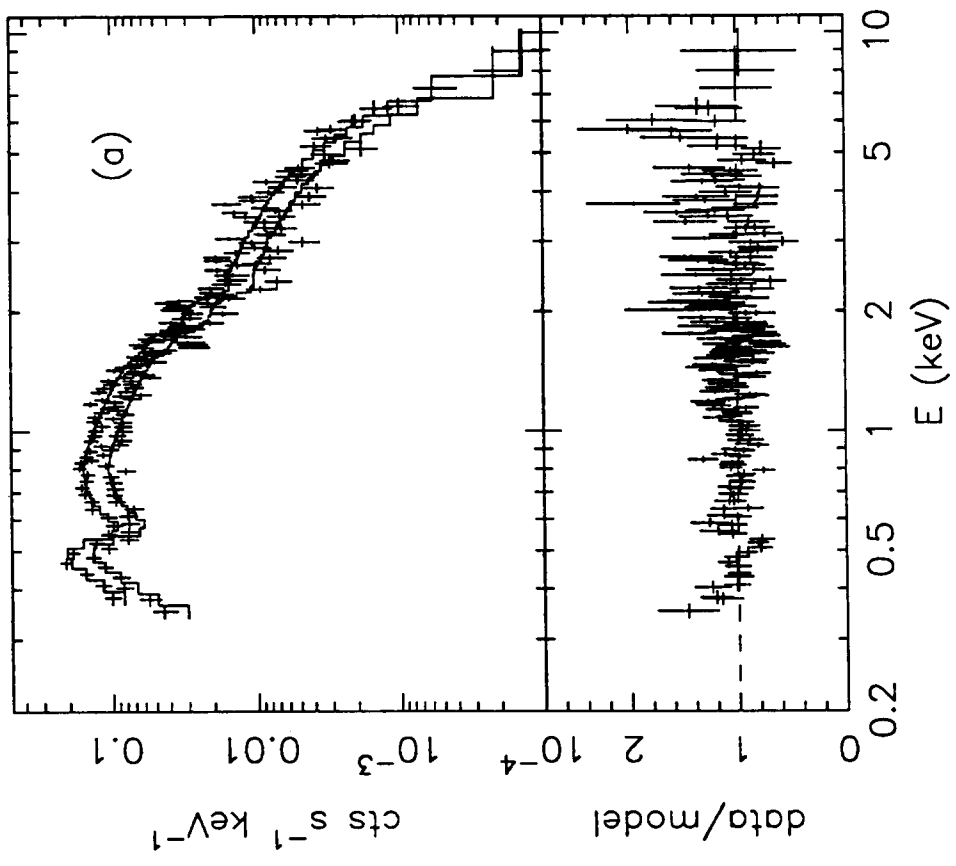


Figure 2a



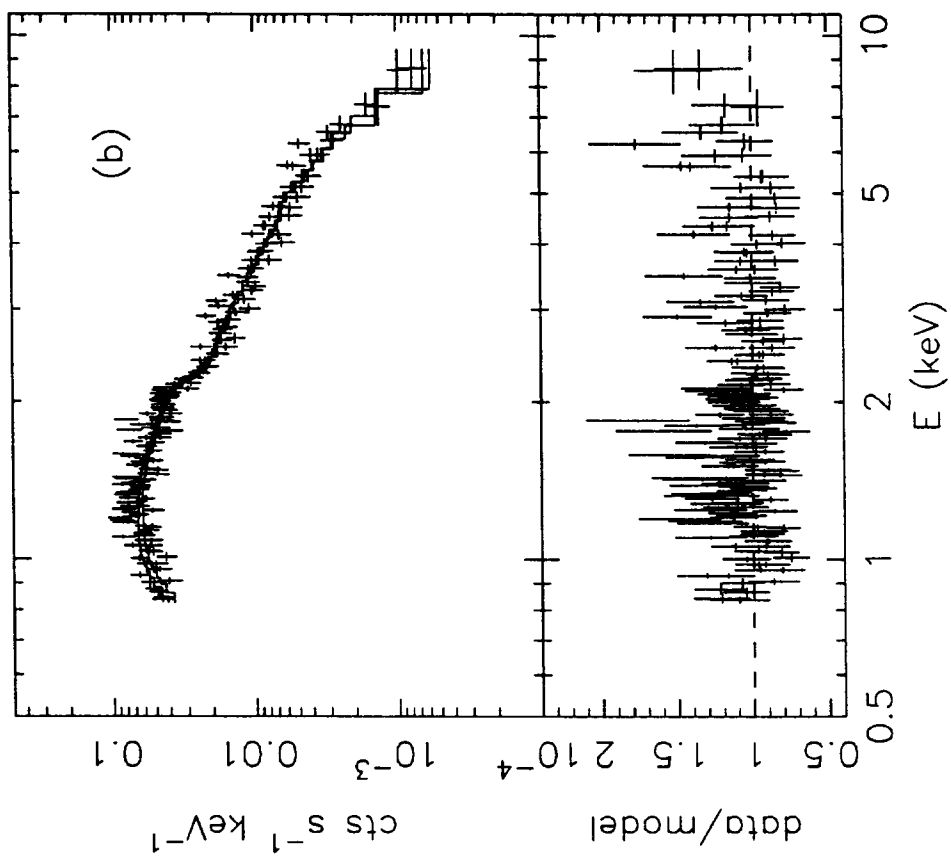
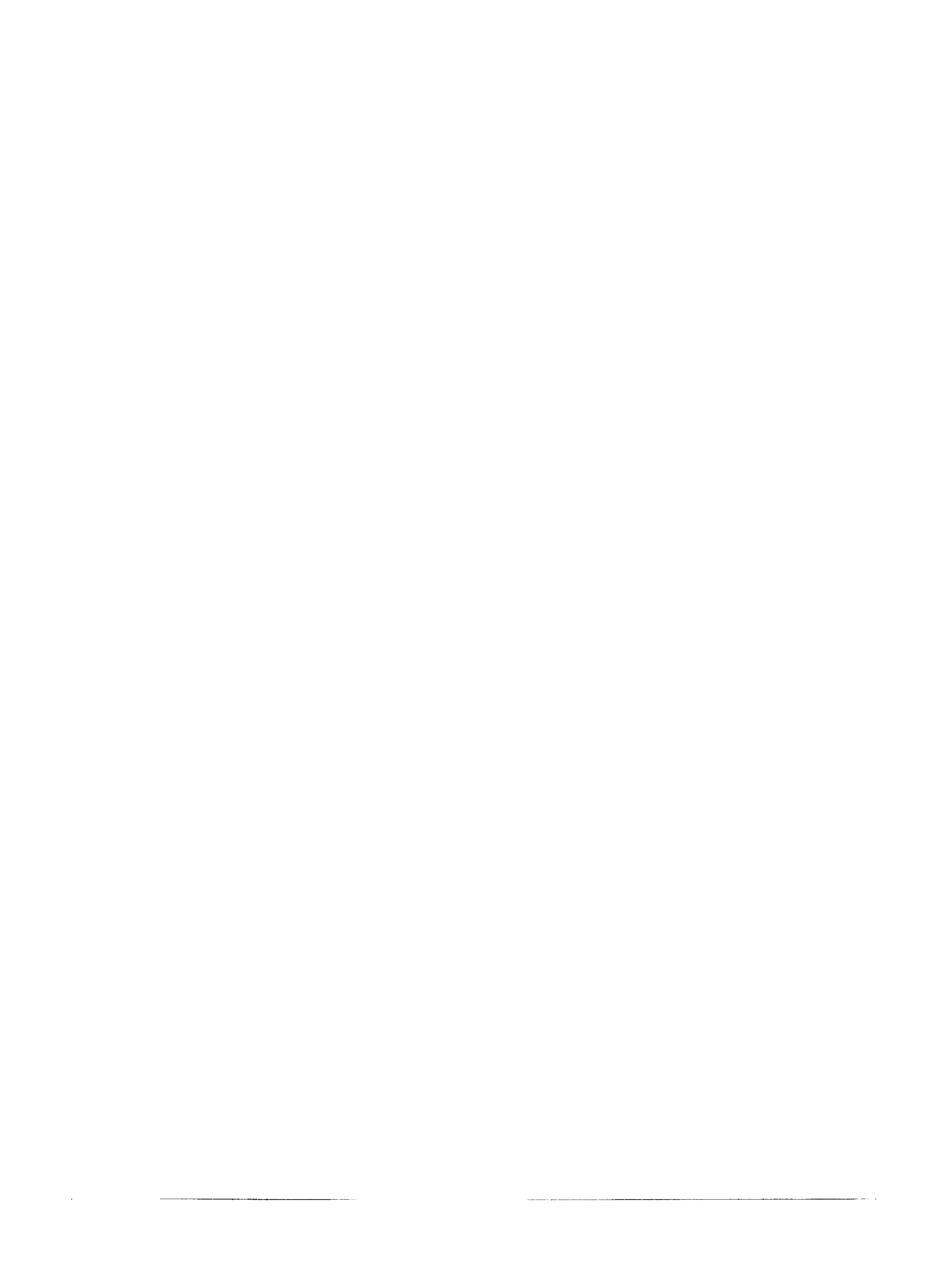


Figure 2b



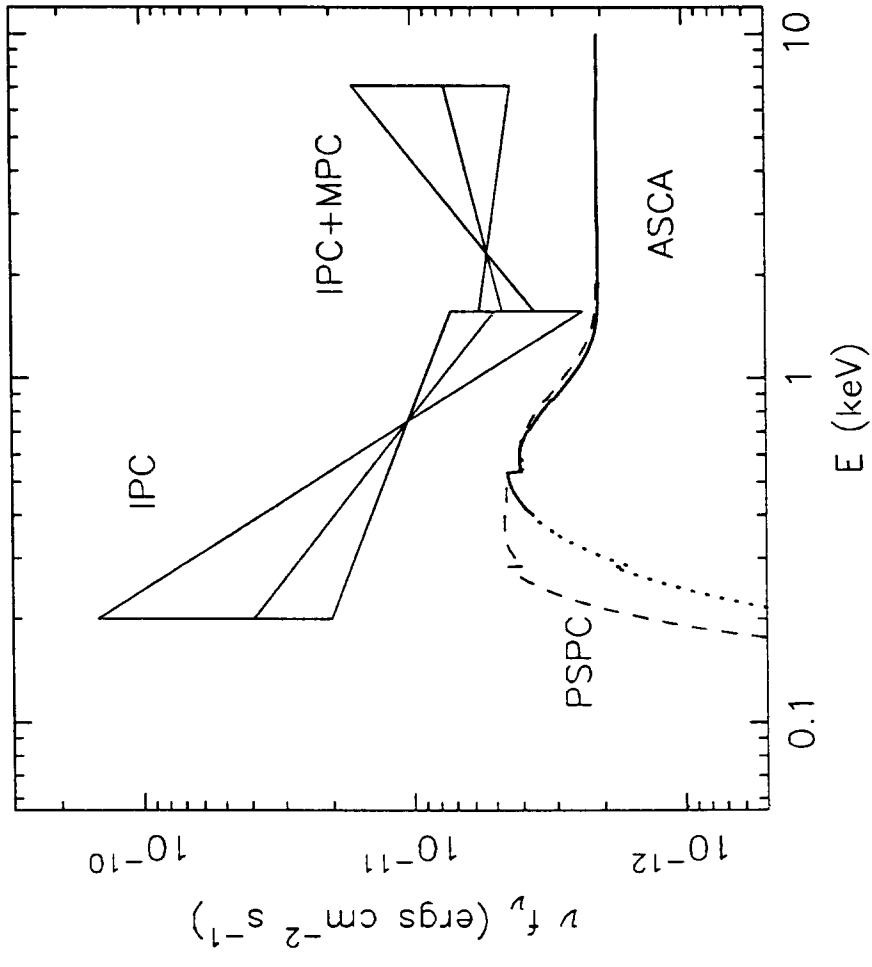
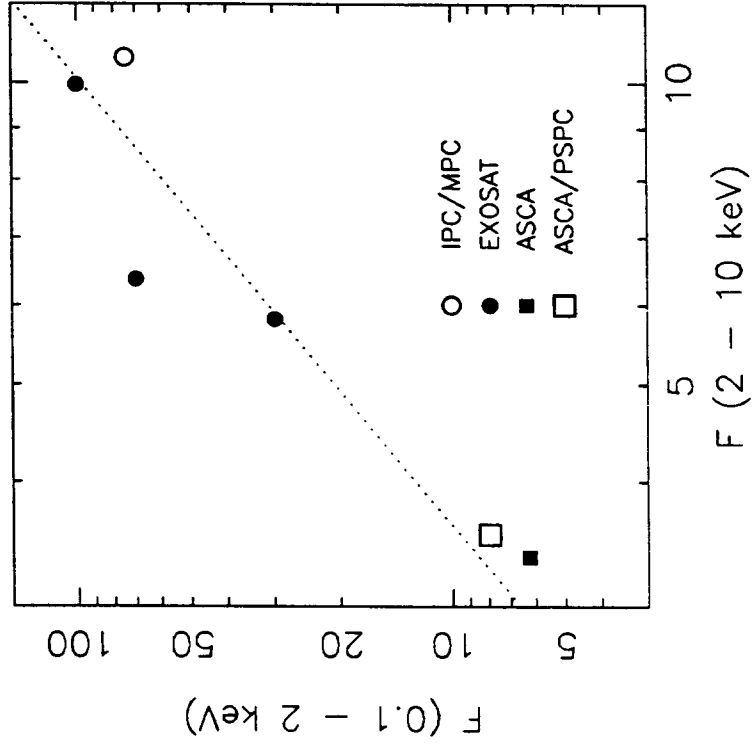


Figure 3





Figure

